

Chemistries of Offensive Breath

Earlier this morning Coralline was reading the “Final Solution” magazine, mainly dedicated to decorative matters. As it happened, feeling as she felt today especially receptive, everything she read from it gave her a pang of recognition. There was even a transcription of a conversation between a camel and its hump... That sounded dumb on the face of it; and up to a point it was. But then something clicked. Noam Chomsky couldn’t have said it better. One point especially stood out for her, kicking her face in, as it were. *Camels*, the writer advered, *were trained from birth to imagine their hump as a stigma*. So that once and for all, and from the outset, each of them stigmatized in their very essence from the word go, their position obtained, as it were; their class level in the strata of the world was definitively established. “Thou shalt be a beast of burden; and no buts about it.”

“Whoever possesses a hump — they are told by nature — that heartless bitch — is rather marked to function as a hump-ridden beast of burden for the economy. Contrariwise, a person let’s say who has a giraffe neck and a diamond necklace to enhance it, usually thinks of herself as upper class, regardless of what her actual work is, or whom she takes orders from...”

This concept of natural gifts or curses has been running amok in all societies of humans...

Coralline was a divorced gal. New ideas brought in a rush a thrill of possibilities for her. She had grown up unconscious of such huge stuff as philosophers’ stones and panaceas, and other deep ontological notions. She had only known about secretaries landing the boss, or humble but pretty nurses marrying the chief surgeon.

Just becoming aware of some of the oppression natural organisms lived under, did change her whole mode of looking at the world. She perused the magazine with a certain unction. She loved to learn. Another of the “Final Solution” essays, one bizarrely titled “An Appendix Extracted from an Ant,”

affected her still more.

In it the author talked about how we are really not allowed to have any influence in our surroundings, if... (and that was an enormous if) we submit to the policies of nature. The economy be damned, nature was the task master.

Her coffee had gone cold. She rang the bell. The maiden came. "Nina," Coralline said, "hot coffee if you please; I think I'll spend the night studying..."

Nina, adjusting her tights, answered: "You don't think about sex and riches anymore. Are you depressed...?"

Coralline was too immersed in her portentous reading to reply. She mumbled and kept on deciphering the truths buried therein, amongst the shiny luxurious pages of the chick magazine.

Later she phoned Maximine, her new friend. "I suffered a great deal when I first read it several years ago; all this Communist stuff, honey, it rots your mind." And then Maximine pointed out with blinding clarity that the all "final solutions" create a perfect world, yes, but too materialist withal.

Maximine said, over the line: "Usually when someone says *your hump creates your reality*, they mean it in a literal sense, sort of like the slogan *your platitude determines your crassitude* or *you are nature's prostitute when bending to decrepitude*, as though one could simply decide on the world that surround them just by trying to eject from this gilded or rusted cage called existence. No, my dear, self-involved denial carries you nowhere but to an early grave... What you must do is throw to the lions all books and printed rubbish and get thee to a make-up artist. Our thoughts and beliefs are rabid viruses..."

Coralline was not convinced by the elder woman's rantings. Her inalienable right to hot coffee marked her sure of being able to converse with the sages, who in their ages enjoyed also the peace of spirit that brought them to understand the whole of it, the fabric of being, and so forth. Stupid people are killed, to put it bluntly, because they are unwilling to study the fine

points of wisdom. If master of the universe, it is true that she could have put a stop to any silly unilateral invasion, or could have at least slowed down the murderous warriors who always show such lack of the courage for they always go against the frail in order to rob them or make intergalactic slaves out of them. No; she would follow her common sense, would have for advisers only the best versed in stoicism and simple-vices. To stand up against the powerful one needs to beat them at ideas, and have incredibly huge followings. For that one needs organs of pollution that are hard to come by without money. Without money you are a marked woman, and you pay for your courage with your life...

She woke up after a few hours. She couldn't remember if she had drunk the coffee per se or if it had been drunk by a goblin or by the maid or by a visitor or by a secret admirer, or maybe it had just evaporated by itself, but this was generally her point: that our fanatical belief in the properties of natural life must be challenge in all fronts, for it causes people to be murdered non-stop or, by lack of solvable riddles, causes plenty of suicides. A lot of stupid people take for granted everything. An oilbath and a bloodbath are only equivalent when the light reverberates in just the proper way of life, which should be non-negotiable. That's what she meant.

She had been dreaming sinister excerpts of the end of the world. The voices were right out of the conclaves where the powerful of the universes concocted their "natural happenings."

The lowly speakers emerged to announce that nature will never be gainsaid. But of course could Coralline may have been the only member waiting for the trite news to spread who knew that all was a ridiculous comedy...? That nature was a sham...?

On the other hand, what folly to pray for courage...! Coralline's orifices needed filling... *Biggest of all, her mouth. Many blind spots appeared before her eyes. She fell vaguely faint. Her failure to grasp the forces of traitorous nature, led to many of her difficulties now... She attempted to stand and fell upon the muddy rug.* The blitzkrieg of ideas coming to her little head with the speed of a bunch of stampeding elephants had left her feeling foolish...

Dragging along, she cursed herself. She tried piping up, but no sound came

out of the dried mouth... Nina the maid who knows for how many hours had been absent, maybe gallivanting with her beaus... All perfectly decent persons can turn into monsters as easily as cheese molds. And there's no reason why one should in just a few thoughts follow a certain chain of reasoning that, when subtly incorrect, at the end of the chain, prove that at the end of the day we've just become another of the numberless insidious intellectuals that prattle away in irretrievable nugacity...

She at length reached the kitchen and ate and ate.

2.

“Since you are on your own, you’ve grown so conceited, Coralline!”

Maximine was rebuking her while briskly walking down the avenue. A new sage’s scowl was adorning Coralline’s wide brow. Trails of exhaust gas kept drifting into their grim faces.

“I have a niece,” Maximine started again, “she’s a corny, cockeyed girl, very ugly, glasses, adipose, you get the picture, an intellectual type, and smelly, her breath...! A sky gazer to boot. Goes out by nights but not to any party or dump where the oil-rich void their greedy contingency plannings, if you know what I mean, far from their greedy wives, stoking the fires of their dying libidos, conjuring up their forgotten dreams of vestals and houris, and above all letting loose and distributing the excess avoirdupois of their plenty stoked wallets, but no, she’s up into the cold freezing top of the hills looking at Venus and the Martians in their dirty synergies and syzygies...”

Coralline scratched her head, she said: “What...?”

“Of course the poor girl is rat-poor,” Maximine emphasized, “she’s not alimony-stricken, to coin a phrase, filthy rich as you are, so that you can avoid all the strictures of those commoners who need worries to stay alive, worries that only add deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars, and instead you can devolve all your leisure into bleak reprisal, let’s say by studying the stoics and their tricks for dying while in the meantime killing

with boredom and unproductivity the bulk of their relatives... Fatalities galore, the woes of the friends, the guffaws of the foes...”

“As a matter of fact I do, winched like a jade,” answered Coralline, quite firmly this time. “Come and let’s sit down over this patch of dry moss, Maximine, for what I am about to tell you shall of all evidence be surprising news to you indeed...”

Maximine was alarmed. “You want to commit suicide, that it...? And I’m not sitting down where the damned dogs happily turd away. Let’s get into some of these watering holes, as the toughs call ‘em.”

It was a dreary haunt for down-on-the-luck gays. Sloppy, fat and stinky men were dancing and prancing, atrociously dressed as atrocious women. The lacquers were all scratched, dimmed, peeling. It was serious oneiric fun, though. They sat down, watched the spectacle with growing grievances...

Coralline bitterly remembered: “My husband’s lover, and mine...”

“Oh, I know...!” Maximine heartily sympathized, “it was horrible, such dire debaucheries! Your lover his lover! Such shock!”

“I was transmogrified into a fallen leaf; ready for mulch.”

“Tell me about it. Don’t I know? What a pity, though. Such a handsome Chink!”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“I know. A circus contortionist! The things he could do! The snakings, the slitherings, the emballments...!”

“The embalmments...? Was he a mortician also...?”

“No; I mean, the way he shrunk himself into a little big ball of substance! Tell me, did he really ever manage to quite put himself whole, you know, inside of...”

“I hate to talk about it.”

“Just a few details I failed to get, come on! Even the balls of his feet, I mean...?” Lascivious bitch, Maximine prodded.

Coralline was quiet for a piece, though you could see she was slightly trembling: a marksman’s trifling target. The obvious lechery of her counterpart, the dismal atmosphere, her thoughts last night of impending finitude and choking existentialism... The tears started to flow...

Maximine waited, slaving over her cold cognac. And then her heart of fire thundered, imploded, pure napalm relinquished with rapturous compassion: “Speak, speak!, damn you!” —she finally implored.

“Such a pollutant, peripatetic, personable phallus as a single man — a moist pliable prong with a face, that was him, a trunk with a comely physiognomy. Damned pederast all told. Compacted as a concertina, and then, inside, expanding like flames. The phycomater with which spends inside turning into plastic, like if with contact with the phthalates inside the womb, plastifying into pipes and cables of some new being... Ah, no, it’s too iniquitous, too wicked!”

“I’m amazed nonetheless at how you keep your perfect composure... Despite so many contretemps. Putting aside the congenital costs of consanguinity and the dreads of contagion, there’s the irk of wounded pride... Ah, my dear, don’t I understand...?” Maximine was picking at the tarnished chrome plating bordering their lame table, with her sham commiserative words trying to extract further confessions.

“Ah, the calamitous consequences of being born into this cage. We are in it but helpless chess pawns, the cuckold and the prostitute, and the tiger and

the elephant. Like a tricked loadstone, each of us keeps leading the van, but, internally, don't we wonder whereto...? Over the flaccid bourns around which our private motherlands must bristle in confusion, nothing, but a rather rapider death looms."

"Indeed, but... God, you've gone so deep in a few days! It's so dangerous unfathomable deepness... Those dark thoughts! My dear, wishes of suicide arise like fumes, sulphurous volcano of the soul."

"Suicide...? I'm not ready for suicide, I'm just haunted by a pushy rage that sizzling whispers to me hidden means by which one could maim the fucking creep so that he loses his job... But I'm in such a two-mind quagmire. On the one hand the decorous revenge, on the other all the teachings of those beautiful clairvoyant philosophers... How can one ever forget the first rule of the stoics, you take command of yourself...?"

"Yeah, but pardon me, ladies. I've overheard passages of your interesting conversation, and couldn't help but..." A burly man-woman interrupted, his drab dress full of malodorous stains. "Look, talking about quandaries. Just measure mine, if you please. I love the excitement of speed, ok? Nothing I love more. I've got a new motorcycle. A darling of power untold. And sweet on the eyes — my, the princess of the roads. I'm just a flaming motorcyclist in love with his machine. Yeah, but what's one to do with his darling of a resplendent vehicle...? You arrive at the airport, your mother's dead in Elmira and you must visit with the rest of the family already intent in scamming you because your heterodox inclinations... So, I'm going to the door of the airport. The employees therein always despaired and diseased, no hope of improvement, only fast deterioration... We all have seen them. All gone old and smelly and cancerous in a jiffy — hideous tumors abounding... And they complain all day about their crazed schedules... I'm not going to go to them to solve my motorcycle problem. On the other hand, if I leave it outside it will be immediately stolen, or vandalized by vandals, or just punished by Jupiter... What to do, the hell if I know. Inside the aircraft no way they want it. Too valuable, or whatever... I could sell it cheap to you two rich ladies, you just keep it for me, you use at your convenience, I see by your dainty hands how careful you'd be with the darling machine, then I'm back, and richer also, and I buy my unspeakably sparkling mounture at a premium, you bet."

"I hate to puncture your pretensions, sir," Maximine carefully spelled. "But have you considered the so-called counterpenalty proposal...?"

"Eh...?" The burly fellow was nonplussed.

"As when one is compelled to commit to predawn procreation, the payback can become prohibitive. I'm a compulsive concertgoer, and so is this fair dyke here, my partner in crime. With the rest of them elegant scoundrels

and popinjays we attend the premieres, never as poor craftsmen and penniless wonders, you bet. None of us acclimatized to misery, really. The graceful curlicues of the line resembling in nothing a cast of characters in police custody... Just the preacher or the priest, the swindlers out of depth with swindlers bigger than them by miles of altitude. See them plucking convulsively at the collars of their asphyxiating coats...?”

“I see nothing. Want to buy or not...?”

“Could you commit a maiming...?” Coralline asked.

“A maiming...?”

“Just some breaking of the legs...”

“Of a human...?”

“A semihuman if you will. A forsworn Chink.”

“Well, let’s talk... Name’s Willie the jackal, who always proceeds in all seriousness.”

“Fine. Here’s my card...” Coralline was about to give him her card, then, when Maximine jumped and snatched.

She laughed in a demented laugh. “*Non est sana puella!*” She screamed.

“Who speaks spic...?” Aggrieved, the tough gay motorcyclist retorted, red-faced too.

“Latin and Greek, my dear. Only things one learns of profit at school. The leading classes rising to lead, plus as a thoughtful gratuity offering off a poetic say of what are they at... *Perí philías kai symmakhías*... About friendship and strategic alliance with the classes d’en bas. That’s froggy for you, also useful at a pinch. *Crimes crapuleux perpétrés sous des prétextes patriotiques*... While the exempt were *cocufying the poilus*... But you surely know the rest of the story, sir. Would not they then remember one of (in all its concomitant apparatus) the poetess’s exquisite compositions of old...? You tell me.”

“Crazy bitch. Are you making fun of me...?”

“Sir, I wouldn’t dare. My dyke friend, fair as she is, wants to maim my husband. When we are in bed, Fred and I, monotonously crisscrossing his most boring feats of the day and mine, and then going about through every secret vista of a same single item, while perhaps the other one already sleeps, for at heart we know, Fred and I, that everything we say are lies, you couldn’t picture a more helpless puppy. Now my friend in her jealousy would castrate or else unleg him, but I most vigorously must differ... Our purposes are at loggerheads. Sir, the request that’s been made of you is by no means ripe... If something adumbrates maybe later we’ll call again,

thank you.”

“Your fucking brains are too ripe. Repellent broads.” Disgustedly, the aging hooligan at last retreated.

Coralline and Maximine had a breath at leisure now. For the while they had been holding at a minimum the pumping of the available air. They discussed a little about the weird chemistries of offensive breath.

“Man, the mucky odd fish surely stank.”

Then it was noon, as usual time to dine. And pretty merry it was too; the servants kind and competent, the food you could condescend to even eat it, and, on the other tables, the dilapidated office men, and the farmers in town with their cowl-like wives providing a mass of anecdotes and scurrility. Everybody so stupid, observing here and there the usual empty ceremonies, with the drinking of healths, the preaching to the choir, the kicks under the plates, the retchings and the climate change crisis, and the funereal burning of the candles...

3.

Angel of death, she thought... If you would rather not be again the last to drown, to its unwinged rump now... you... must... hurry.

Angel of... Inform my deformed form... Winded and winched like a jade, I thee thus beseech...

Coralline was in the bathroom, sitting snugly at the commode, somnolently perusing some essay by Schopenhauer...

Nina the maid, the fresh vixen, who had been suspiciously out of breath when her mistress (“the learned hyena”) had arrived home, now peered from the door ajar to the bathroom...

“Would you like,” she started, “for me to enumerate the times the Magic Palmist has called...?”

“Who the dickens is the Magic Palmist...?”

“You tell me, it was a gruff voice of an old woman, I thought. Plus she seems to relish her disagreeable job.”

“All this is shameless arbitrariness. How could you tell...?”

“Look, whoever is caught emending nature, trying by dirty tricks a release of sorts from the deserved miseries of this world, sins again the maker or mackerel of the whole shebang...”

“Are you under the impression that mackerel is the feminine form of maker...? My god, that’s a kind of a sardine!”

“Sardine yourself. A red herring you are giving me, and stinking red also. Plus: A mocking laugh that could be heard for a mile yet as she sliced and splotted the words of the righteous, says the Bible some place, remember, is the sign by which the malign is made manifest. When poor Walter the wildebeest came to talk to the magicians at the temple about his sexual problems, and he had his whole family in tow, he was also laughed away, and told that he was a liar to top it all, and that his home town had been in consequence obliterated.”

“Walter the wildebeest...? You are silly. That must be in some other fairy tale!”

“Poor Walter! The damned unbelieving priests of the magical temple, anti-idolaters that they were, wouldn’t believe maps or other idolaters’ marks of evil possession. When Walter the wildebeest came back the next day with a few pages of some old newspapers of the biblical ages, where three or four articles stood published over the years..., and dealt with Walter’s town, and named some outstanding members of his family... The batch of clippings must have been one of his most prized treasures, proud that he was of his family, poor but dignified enough, not like some folks in the dissolute cities... But then the infidel anti-idolaters said: These are all lies. And with a snap of their claws they snatched the papers and went to the table over

the corner... And they yelled: 'Tis all wrong, those towns sure deserved obliteration. And forthwith they scratched off the names over the maps and the newspapers and wrote on top instead an awful spate of nonsense..."

"Indeed!"

"Poor Walter was appalled. Defeated, he retreated with his head on the mud, pelted besides by the loud and mean guffaws she spat at him, the righteous wildebeest."

"Well, thank you for the tale well told, and now warm my bed, please. I'll be finished in a sec or less..."

"Shun the witch, shun the obnoxious witch forever. Nothing good will ever come of her... This is what I have to say."

"Ok, I've heard you. Next time the what..., the Magical Palm-reader calls send her packing. Tell her I have a better interpreter of the occult powers..."

"Laugh, laugh. Laugh your soul to the embers eternal..."

As Nina disappeared, Coralline got up, wiped herself, looked at the bottom of the commode... It is merely apparent, she thought, though, damn, does it smell ugly. But as there is a huge difference between a mistake and a crime, so between what's discarded and what's kept. As she flushed, she had a vision of all the Christian clergy, perfectly in order, chanting in a deadening monotone that the real purpose of life is suicide. And that thwarting the act or even quarrelling against it can't be either ascetic or reach a ethical standpoint of even moderate heights.

She went to the console near her office; she unwrapped a few of the little packets of make-up products she'd bought that evening with Maximine, she was trying a new delicately perfumed lipstick when the doorbell rang. She on a reflex stepped to one side of the console, she flattened against the wall...

Learning about morals from the best philosophers of Europe makes you very wary, chary, distrustful of the whole world. Her freshly manicured nails were nervously dancing over the red buttons of the console. Nina was at the door. Murmurs of conversation reached her as vibrations of doom. At length the door snapped close again.

“Nina, who was it...? So late!”

Nina tried her best to look busy. It looked as if her zeal must be instigated by some secret connection. One of her many beaux, surely. She ignored her mistress at first. Then she faked ignorance.

“I’d bet you are wet...” Coralline said.

“Waging is against the strictures of the scriptures, plus the extraordinarily active fanaticism with which the clergy of the monotheistic religions encourage not wagering is supported both by the bible and the rest of the organum...”

“Whatever. Let’s go to bed, and we’ll see...”

4.

Coralline had Spengler in mind (or at least a second or third hand version of it) when she said, in front of the mirror, as she was washing away the sticky residues of three orgasms enjoyed eight or more hours before, “There is a good girl who covets nothing better than the smiley prospect of a late soft swift euthanizing of the spent self...”

Feeling thus virtuous, last night thrice brought to death in the flower of her age by the skillfulness of her lovely maid, dweller at the present in a cloudy

worry-free afterbliss, she would have had to look a long time to find another woman more barren of ill-boding ideas than she.

She thought that as her obscurantist neighbors, silly congregants, televisationally bereft of all wits, with a belief that a shirt or shift taken off a sick person and thrown into a portentous well of shimmering rays will prognosticate his fate... In the program seen in passing the other night, when the garment floated the person was supposed to recover, when sinking he should die a thirsty death... How unlike the unpoisoned raven (ravens never believe the rubbish the religionist cabal feeds the witlings mesmerized by the screens), the studious raven, who, when thirsty, filled bye and bye, with pebbles, a pitcher half full of rain-water, up until the liquid could be reached by its beak... And if anybody should have witnessed such resourcefulness and filmed it, alas, and made it available to the credulous public, there you have it, another stupid miracle. How quickly would then the devout rush to kill the raven, maybe as one by the devil possessed, or, a contrario, in order to carve its miraculous bones, each chip cut off from it to be put into water, and then that water would cure men or cattle of their diseases... Plenty of rackets like these popping non-stop... But...

Smut-gray bones... Chipped... Coralline felt an increased anxiety about her collections... Indeed, that was just the dream she'd had. She was back at the University. The year was over. Everybody had vacated the edifice. Now the cleaning crews, plus the spooks at Naval Intelligence (which was definitely running some sort of treacherous operation, as always), had invaded the premises. She had been caught. "The fuck you doing here...!" And harsher yells backed by submachine guns pointing at her, angry guns eager to fume. She was only saving the beautiful books of the beautiful philosophers of old, barbarously left soaking in the clogged toilets by the imbecilic students who had finished their pseudo-education and who now were all in for the asthmatic grasping, loose in the jungle, panting for the greed and the apoplexies, dying of insatiable voracity and cloying stinginess, with no need anymore for sophronema and sophrosine, and common sense, and fortitude, and eupepsia and eubiosis, and the grasping of the authentic realities...

As the man who has no wife is no cuckold, so the surgeon who has no fool to operate on is no murderer, and the soldier with no bombs is no drooping morbid killer and no December mushroom has a chance to survive in the congealed resilience of snow... And a moan can piously sink, if anything,

through haunted centuries. Whilst the swiveling fringes of the cellophaned salve of a fatuous groan will startle a staggering shudder out of the veins of a walker suddenly faced by the awakened bear... Ah, damp tropical breezes... The strange (and oddly apropos) nightmare still nonchalantly gnaws at the lasts of my clogs as I trudge along, loaded with the saved shit-dripping books of the my revered hoary thinkers... Without books we are but untaught beasts whose bestiality appalls the very essence of the trees... There, behind those coarse-barked boles, a shifting presence of a princes in veils, teasing, in flight... Or I'll start (fate willing) something with her... Boy, the vaudevillian deviless, how she fixes me! Wait, lovely vision, wait! Damned books, how they encumber and hamper my progress! Still trees, my lone friends, I know I am the only one to witness this unique phenomenon: the gentle shedding, the slow descending of that last dead leaf... No, no! The phantasmagoric presence melting in the brumes... There is an ontological need for a crisp pronouncement that would now stop the ineluctable process of the precious vanishing... Ah, crazy cornucopia of perpetual predicament...! It is preposterously comic, horned deviless, now I'm about to get you, now you've gone miles afar, by my debilitated hand forever unreachable...

Coralline was startled when Nina popped in.

"Hey, Nina, what a fright!"

"Your stupid old fortune teller waking me up again...? Didn't you hear the phone...?"

"The tap must have been running... Listen, Nina, I was thinking... As somebody not married can't be made a cuckold of..."

"Yes. What?"

"Neither the unborn can bewitch you to follow them to the no-end well..."

"Is that another one of your dreams, ma'am...? I'm taking a shower now."

Coralline had to shout now over the din and the steam of the falling water.

“You know how I hate to pontificate and be cute... But the careful fall of that single leaf, as sternly witnessed solely by me, epitomizes the irrepeatability of anything. Time will not come back, nobody else will ever see us, united by those faintly screeching seconds, leaving on the always clean slate of eternity those receding but unmistakable marks of having actually skated together for an amiable while...”

“I don’t hear shit of what you say!”

Coralline stood silent. She thought how true it was that we only hear what we want to hear. One’s parents’ coitions are heard even with the loudest songs on, sound of musics of all sorts being always sunken by the sighs of clumsy caresses, the whines of closing passages being battered and rammed, the grunts of cold phlegms being circumnavigated round the creaking bed...

She had the willies all of a sudden. A shiver walked her spine. She willed herself to think of something else... Sex and murder, they gel. In those shitty circumstances, who could ever find the proper skein of lethargic mysteries her pain intrinsically needed to achieve at all any substantial soothing...?

Not even the useless chorus of notables... — those arbitrarily chosen philosophers of old to the rescue, now snot-gray and dripping with toilet matter, in a knot..., at a side, like spitballs, maggoty journalists all around in a pile, waiting forever, with their in-grown implanted mikes and cameras growing as the spikes of strange teratogenous little crushable beasts...

Not even them, the reasonable enough sages, managed to unfold any kind of sensible litany... They themselves were also too astounded... She was on fire, doomed, marked... On fire. For light or arson... For the best and the worse use... Ah, now! That cued for her the suddenly remembered exquisite compositions of old... Would she too, ever so calmly, now expect to see herself, or rather her swan neck go pose itself on the huge hand of the butcher, maybe sometime soon... It never is too late... Like this, my beauty, ever so slowly... With the assassination of Oswald king of the Northumbrians in yon dungeon dark, nabbed by the scruff of the neck and brought to a makeshift block...

“Hey!” Nina woke her up from the delightful reverie. “Breakfast in ten mins, is there consensus in the pews...?”

“I’ll be there, dummy, count me in. I’m starving and ready therefore to sing panegyrics to whatever gets cooked.”

5.

Coralline found at last the homo haunt of the day before. She entered the stinking dump. She sat and asked for tea.

She was sipping the scalding brew and dared put the question to the crumpled superannuated waiter. “Do you know if Willie the jackal is around...?”

“The slob usually comes in around eleven... If he’s not traveling for one of his jobs...”

After a while of waiting and a few more cups of tea, Coralline needed to piss. Monkey the waiter showed her the way to the pissing place. She found it pitch black and so hot that she was soon pouring with sweat. There was not a crack anywhere through which a chink of light could get in. She didn’t know where to piss. Soon she heard the nasal music of barrel organs, the sound of bells and cymbals; the wild party had again commenced... Willie the jackal must now be at the house. Somebody opened the door, the light poured in... Now she saw the hole on the floor where the juices were meant to flow... Willie’s silhouette appeared cut against the shimmering smoke... “And were you asking for me...?”

“First hold the door ajar, that I might see where the jet is due, ok...?”

No other preliminary courtesies, then. Now they were fast friends. She pissing and farting in front of him, he taking his dong out to do some of the

same...

Back at the table they conversed unimpeded by the unalloyed racket; on the contrary, they found themselves rather helped by it, for their tête-à-tête bordered the conspiratorial. The flecked enamel of plates and mugs had no clout whatever to reflect their reddened resolute faces. Willie the jackal, who had always pretended that he rode everywhere and usually at a good clip, now was keeping straight and quiet, stiff as a rod. No sloppy commemorations of past glories, riding into semi-abandoned villages and sowing chaos pell-mell, storming a barn and holding court in the lousy apex of his exploits, making the farm drudges stagger up to him, the idol — the idol with his intercrural icon beckoning abreast, to be fondled and pawed and licked and adored by everyone, and mercy save whoever was stumped in his abilities to worship, for forthwith his head would be stamped on, for the Willie had a scimitar and, with a single flight of it, the neck of the offender would get neatly sliced, and everybody else among the gang would jump for joy and start a soccer match... Quaintly inspired, the two teams, in poised symphony, would shoot and score, and whoever had been nominated the prince (for Willie the jackal according to himself would always be declared the undisputed queen) would fetch his wherewithal with both hands and exploding the staggering expectations in the charged atmosphere would fling himself into the pitch, splendidly personified as the great redemptive remedy of an action all craved, ailingly, to a body — namely then, and plainly, what he did, he would hold his balls in a ball and with the teeth of the severed head he would castrate himself... However, it must be said that almost every time Willie explained those heroic deeds of his and his gang, many made fun of them... Often, especially when tipsy and with a handgun over the counter, though many struggled to cough some awkward spark of cynicism, nobody dared in the upshot do other than stir queasily and silently... The haggard hunch was that nothing short of terrifying was bound to ensue... The creep would surely shoot whoever doubted his malapropisms of a silly braggart...

Be it as it may, now he was sober and surreptitiously counting some advance money...

Coralline was saying: “Remember, roulotte number four. Enter unannounced. Get under the elephants, in between the studs, the props for the cages, where the big turds are gathered, the stink, only flies and bugs go and stay there... If you must ask, ask for Chuck the Chink — Twig Withy is only his nom-de-scene. Burst apart the flimsy door and bang with the bat

his two legs, smash his knees to smithereens, and probably with that he'll be finished showing off his freaking elasticity, which is such an irresistible sexual jailbait, I mean, attraction to both male and female... Go in and don't look at him, he'd mesmerize you, you'd be a sucker the moment you saw him at his most seductive, he'd do some of his tricks and contortions, he can fashion himself in a jiffy into either an anal or vaginal dildo of throbbing flesh, be careful above all not to be enamored on the spot... And previously don't attend to his act... Go and take a dump when he is in the central stage, in the middle of the arena, with all the spotlights caressing his suave shenanigans..."

Willie said: "Are you taking me for a sap...? I know how to take care of myself, worry you not a damned bit. The sneaky deed shall be sneakily done. Word of a jackal. He's never been known to bungle a chore."

She was faking a cold, she held a scented little silk handkerchief to her nose almost non-stop. She was paying for some pastis (Pernod, Ricard?) for she knew that the disgusting concoction tasted and smelled as mouthwash. With that she hoped to forestall some of the overpowering stench coming from the scatter-toothed mouth of the surely carrion-munching jackal.

"Well, what a scatterbrain that I am, my god, I had forgotten, I must be off!" Coralline leaped. "I must give our strategic studies the kiss of death for now. Call me once you are done; you well know the number, ha-ha."

She was off, a little bit hobbled by a rebel heel who had splintered in her anxious adventure in the damp crapper. Piecemeal, her awkward steps resonated in the sour boardwalk following the river... She was thinking hard... In the meanwhile, unbeknownst to her, maybe due to the fact that perihelion currently occurs in early January, close to the winter solstice, her shadow hid and scampered, eloped with the shadow of a frantically movable tree, perhaps a discarded plastic Christmas one... Both shadows, in the shade of some clouds, could at last blessedly melt in delicious agony, they were having the sense rather of a Greek aorist, denoting that which once happened, and still continues to happen, pointing to a condition of feeling not limited to any time whatever...

She peered behind... Unquiet, as if assaulted by a sudden premonition of doom... Where was her fucking shadow...? No, no Sun. Had it set

already...? Morose, she mistrusted even herself, her senses, her floating after-soul, her feminine intuition, all that...

Anyhow, that certainly was no time to joke... After such a momentous decision... Woodenly, she censured herself, jokes coming forth from recalled shows... Lousy, lame, keen-less... Some senile jests huskily knitted by creepy comedians — sick, poor, unbalanced... Drooled when nothing else comes to mind... Or is permitted by the turd-sucking censors...

I've drunk to much of that frog swill, she told herself. And sat on a bench above the river. Being and nothingness, that is the question. Hate to put a crimp on such a paltry single phenomenon, but what matters is the limitless tending upwards and onwards for all time towards our presents ideals fulfilled... Something like that... Screw the consequences...

The phone in her gabardine's pocket rang. It was Chuckeline, her mother-in-law, well, the affable woman who used to be... She was phoning to ask if she could put her in. She was in town for a very grave matter. She had been here since the day before yesterday. Now she had quarreled again with her son. She felt much better with her ex-daughter-in-law.

Of course, Coralline said she (and probably was true) that she was delighted to have her at home. That she was going to call Nina about it. That she herself would be back shortly. That thank god she'd call. That she was always welcome, that she should come to her house first think. Skip visiting the bastard, he was such a pain in the ass...

She no longer felt winched and winded like a bloody loser jade... She with some elation peered high at the starry night, at which the shepherd's heart does also take so much pleasure, indeed not, as the tyro might fancy, with any impure heart — imagining the houris and all the other extraterrestrial whores sown here and there in the coruscating planets — waiting to lasciviously dance just for him and his sheep makeshift lovers — all upright now in one common fate, saved (the sheep, for the sheep — unlike the wolves — somehow always get save, thanks to sacrifices and ceremonies and such balderdashes,) saved therefore the whole bunch, or how do you call it, the horde, the herd — but with a pure one (heart,) seeing himself and them tender lambs and lambettes as a bevy, a flock, a quacking fleet of angels aloft...

She called Nina now. Thank goodness she was in. “Listen, Chuckeline is coming... Make the spare room ready for her... Ah, she’s told you already...? She’s in better terms with us than with her rotten bastard of a son... Listen, I’ve met the palmist..., the sweaty palms mind-reader, the cookie of fortunes, whatever, the pestering silly old woman you were so jealous of...? She’s no old woman, she’s a stupid homo tough who the other day saw one of my cards in a flash and memorized the number... He says he translates the numbers into letters in lighting speed... Automatically... A warping of the mind due to his line of work... A professional distortion... A cop or something, a spy, looking for mysterious clues, and people trying to blow us up... To blow us up, to blast us to heavens... Naughty you are... He says our number spells GIRLIESCUM... I said: does it...? How nice...! He said: I choose always words with “dirty” meaning, if you know what I mean, like this they are much easier to imprint, nothing clicks into the brain so well... A stinking revolting putrefied bully... With sweaty palms, as I say, like shaking not a hand but a stagnant little pool of phlegm with five hideous lizards capering inside... I’m joking about him trying to pass for a magic palmist and having such noticeable palms...He says I only sweat and itch when relaxing out of the job (meaning he wasn’t pursuing me for no filthy blackmail — talking about filthy, you should’ve seen his nails!) He says, when on the job, trust me, I’m cool as a mackerel. I said: you too...?! He’s very stupid, he doesn’t get the joke. Anyway, he won’t annoy us anymore... Now he’s sure we are just a couple of dupe broads only intent on getting some tail and not on trying to undermine the principles of our hallowed democracy... Plus I gave him a check of \$25 for the spies’ circle or their syndicate’s charity... I don’t know, but... Whoever cashes that check, he’s not coming back for more. Well, I guess in this hallowed democracy of ours we all have to go on buying little allotments of tranquility... By the way, I’m so late because a friend of a friend of a friend had her head under a steamroller... You bet she died... Chutney of brains and bones, seasoned with dogshit... Okay, we went to the undertaker and he’s is putting a fake head on the trunk, a wax affair, made-up with all the chichis, no qualms whatsoever, the bitch never looked so good before the steamroller rumpus, the steamroller bash, brain-bash... Ha-ha, yes... I love Chuckeline, she so gracious, and genial and amiable... Yeah, I think so too... Well, honey, see you in a few... Bye...”

Coralline drove to a mall. She needed the bathroom once more. She had to empty all the that frog-spit swallowed in the pigsty with the putrid jackal. She bought a book and went into the clean stalls. Quoting or quasi-quoting none too queasy now (au contraire) the equally hallowed Marx: After food,

clothing, cover, and cunt..., a commode. A commode is the fifth commodity. As price opposes value, so the higher the price the lower the value (be it of something or of somebody,) and so the future of the West and the quality of commodes is interlocked. As the East gets more and more refined in its shitting practices so the value of dung itself devalues, and..., eh..., she was stumped, damn, always strictly limited and defined as to form and duration. In fine, the human condition was inescapable. Next she bought two little gifts, one for Nina and for Chuckeline. A darling little figurine of a gruesome monkey pushing and shoving some well-proportioned naked fountain nymphs for the senior woman, and a Japanese iron cudgel supposedly used in older folkloric times as an eminently reusable ass wipe for samurais. Indented or smoothly notched at every fraction of an inch, it was assured in the prospectus attached to it that it could even wipe away the tiniest of mustard seed, plus it had a set of cymbals at the bottom to indicate that the wiping had been successful. The wiper would shake it to show that the universal assumption of his skill was justified and the congregation rejoiced at such heroic and advanced achievements. Of course faqirs and other lowly castes had to be content using their fingers and washing them afterwards in the public well. Coralline for a harmless amusement made the cymbals clang, the dainty clangor brought her back, sweeping a the purview of few centuries which could be viewed as steeped and bathed in wells of essentials... One must always calculate from available precedents if willing to enter into the great ages of the so much pined-for gigantic conflicts nowadays...

The stupid cow-like cashier, a Negro fat woman, only answered: "Uh-huh..."

Uncommitted losers, she wasn't going to cry for them when the cataclysms came.

6.

As she was driving herself home Coralline was thinking not about the charming notions of the last decaying egghead whose book she'd bought at the shopping center and later had been lightly scanning while comfortably

sedent at the stall, sat or sitten on the clean commode — not therefore about how the massless Dirac fermions are pulled by magnetic fields in such a quaint manner that they gain a dynamic of their own, very much like precocious orphan bugs who, once embedded in some godforsaken rug, have to deal with the vicious raw material of the hither-and-thither crazily pulling-and-pushing rotten membranes of “what’s there,” each of them poor bugs singly at it, whether ready or not, gnawing and humping away, as if imbued with the undue burden of a raw impelling force on their own — the philosopher was picturing them in his mind, was going so far even as to transform into one of them tiny vulnerable bugs, outcast, ill-clad, uproariously grouchy and yet plenty plucky in the face of so much corrupted interlocking of so many piled-up adversities in a dizzying maelstrom of confluences of battling inimical territorialities, where shrugging guesses follow hints of confusion, and the gristles of the noses, and chewers and suckers and tendrils and tromps, and hoses and antennae and so on, get farther and farther afield, sniffing, exploring away, impelled by the hidden force of life, impaled by the kicks of blind, stupid, repetitive, mistake-prone, neither-rhyme-nor-reason, horror-tale, nowhere-bound evolution-driven eagerness, until, without warning or clue, here it is the ultimate blow, the hammer of death suddenly falling, all in the short instant of a bug’s existence... The tragic total sapping of so much vitality in the passing step of a half-drunken anguish-ridden broad going back to the console, not, mind you, to read about something enlightening as, say, a thick volume on Egyptology, where the first few chapters are conflated first in a single very palatable and easy to swallow paragraph, but to serve herself another shot...

No, Coralline was thinking about the loaded conundrum of the scorching wayfarer as a tottering old geezer... Thinking in a word about the gutsy fun woman who used to be her mother-in-law.

While at the helm of her smooth vehicle, Coralline was repeating formulae of gentile greetings: Charmed I’m sure... And: Hope you haven’t been sick... And: The family good...? And: The winter of the West, the victory of materialism and skepticism plainly suit you, and how becoming you those black rags with understated pearls on top... The convoluted way one uses when one talks even when trying to explain the easier of every day’s tasks... Telling her: Don’t mind me, I must be looking a wreck, such a terrible day, the shops a madness, the girls at the counters stupider than ever, I’m winded and winched like trumped-up jade... And: I was there when it happened, the cruel cops frisking the sluggish clown, who was nonetheless carelessly foisting grins on the scandalized audience, the cruel cops only

pretending to frisk, in fact sticking him full of tiny poisoned daggers, conniving with the higher authorities to stamp all fun away, burning the circuses, sacrificing the strippers, prohibiting the smokes and the shots and the snorts...

“Hi, mama,” she greeted, kissing Chuckeline thrice on the cheeks.

Dear elder, juicy older lady, her eyes were wet with affability and judicious joy. They kissed next on the mouth. Nina was fetching a few extra aperitifs. She, Nina, was behaving a bit oddly, as if stuck-up, looking down on her betters. Did she know that not so long ago they (the two stylish mistresses) had even dallied together in a bit of harmless sex...?

Well, what can you do, affinities impose themselves, and the proximity of familiarity... They had hit it on... Once, the second year she had been married to her perjured son, the two of them, Chuckeline and Coralline, had taken a summer vacation together... And had Coralline learned, and has she been glad! And was her mother-in-law a vast source of good news! Many perks indeed were gained thanks to her seniority, both under the lofty sails of the cruiser and already in the island mountains. Chic hoary hairs open many otherwise obdurate doors — the guards thinking (if at all, bunch of stolid sticks-in-the-mud) that what the hell, that person shall anyway be presently, either straight away or in so short a duration that it doesn't pay to interrupt one's dumb somnolence. After all, is not like she (the bitchy crone) is going to enjoy for that long her privilege, her exception to the rules, her exclusive new knowledge, or whatever... While, in sparkling contrast, for a young comely person (like myself, thought Coralline,) due to what trick in the enduring transition from the general to the particular phase of evolution, being scapegoated, alas, is only the norm. The vain shareholders in your existential surrounding toss you out, revengefully, and you're no longer CEO even of your own vital trajectory. You depend on so many malicious fags, the uniformed ones above all, such assholes, such pains in the neck. For us, the young and wonderful, all becomes so up-hilly and rocky and difficult...! Now irrupts cheatingly at play the universal animus against youth (especially as in my case when added to money and beauty,) boom, there it is, a dragon of hatred, raising its ugly pate, green monster, the envy, and then, of course, the suspicion that that marvelous person, already so blessed by the diverse deities, now will to top it all know too much — too much too soon from the obtuse arcana freighted maybe with radiant spills of meaning, and from the total hermetic machinery of power — and that's unacceptable by all accounts to

such a cowardly sold-out society — built exclusively on envy... For us so many doors stay closed, so many secrets undivulged, so many mysteries uncrackable... That's where getting safely in tow behind, I mean after, the old distinguished woman, faintly, though securely and effortlessly, blazing a path of discovery, is so crucial! Excellent (and educational indeed) vacations all told, yes sir, not for this scrumptious time (not ever!) the millions of dreary hours spent in listlessly yawning, in depressing ennui, in suicidal immensity, in ponderous boredom, feeble caged moneys, psychotically itchy, full of tics..., depletedly, and suddenly rushingly, scratching your genitals..., obsessive, combing the short hairs ensconced in your nostrils..., clearing your throat of sticky undiggable phlegms..., slowly falling to pieces, and plunging into the well of despair, of spleen, of melancholy, of despondency, of etcetera, and etcetera and etcetera... All this family slow shit dripping morosely, such morbidity of thoughts, you are fed up with everything, but especially the idle fucking, and worse, the inane fucking around, and you want to kill them all, or end it all, and kill into the bargain (what a bargain indeed!) yourself, your fucking self too...

“How are things, mama! Coming back, I was recalling our mountain vacation. Such a delicious, divine little junket, no...?”

“Some people regarding whom you always more or less took for granted that they had kept the acquisition of a certain native intelligence, in a new light how they appear to really be peculiarly driveling dickheads, do they not, dear...?”

“Mama, I'm concerned, what is it...?”

“I'm here for Jippie. He's having some bouts of dementia; I'm afraid the blasted disease will soon become irreversible unless we do something (and fast) about it. Would you believe that our doctor refuses to apportion Jippie with some so-called forbidden hard medicines...?”

“The bastard!”

“I'm told than in the dumps of the city specimens are available... With a bit of expense, of course, and after investing also in some resourceful research... Contraband stuff, illegal, and so on. Something very good,

surely, or else why would they take so many pains to hide it from even us...?”

“Indeed! The criminal multinationals, the pharmaceutical compost piles, the sneaky politicians, I don’t doubt it for a sec. Poor Chuckeline, how right you are!”

“Anyway Jippie’s mind’s a mess. It never was anything much to speak of. But now, dear, deteriorating fast, his brain all blemishes, focuses, islets, lacunae a go-go. Gaga all the time, poor darling guy. I said, I must do...”

“Go-go, gaga, gummy, waiting for Godot... The guy gone in the noggin, his gooscap at loggerheads... Such talent, you shame us all. Ha-ha. Dear, you always had a way with words!”

“Pas vrai...? And wait for next livraison... Justement... Yesterday in the plane I was thinking, boy, wasn’t that Beckett off the mark!”

“Ha-ha, poor guy, why?”

“Wasn’t he who said there’s more pricks than kicks? Well, I had nothing better to do... The novel by that Frenchman too silly...”

“Which Frenchman...?”

“That faggot Céline...?”

“I love Céline!”

“Well, he has a woman’s name.”

“What’s wrong with that, so do we!”

“Not the same, you devil, you.”

“What about the Chinks, they all got idiotic pet’s names. Or like prick’s names, or like dildo’s... Dong, Chung, Fong, Gong-Gong...?”

“Exactly, that I was thinking... You pricks, always so male-centric! More pricks than kicks...? Give me a break, you must be daft! While there is only roughly half of the population with pricks, everyone kicks the bucket, therefore there is at all times not only more kicks than pricks but roughly the double!

“Double your pleasure, though, of course, he might have said the contrary...”

“Ah...?”

“I mean Beckett, gratuitous bastard, aren’t they all the same...?”

“Ah. Now you’ve set my brain a-dancing, naughty girl! Maybe he had it right... Maybe he said more kicks than pricks... I ought to spank you.”

“Please! Refais-le-me-le...!”

“Ill-starred maiden who kicks against the pricks!”

“You got that right, ha-ha!”

“Plus listen: And the *sapiens hath said* in his heart: There’s but meaning, the rest is past time...”

“*There’s but meaning, the rest is past-time*! How deep! Did you read it today?”

“Yeah, one of these days. I’m about halfway in the booklet by that faqir who comes down from that very high standpoint, where there is no longer a

valid moral reason for condemning any practice, be it (the instance of intertwined happening) lost wherever, whether in the future or the present, or the pluperfect if you will..., and argues that in every case, when we are told about the suicides of the so-called past, none of them hold water, every case winched and tricked and a damned ascription, how you call it, an anaphylactic (for instead of helping and boosting the live intricate tissue suddenly proves toxic), and apocryphal, scriptoid added much later by the manipulators of time, which is non-existent by the way, for only space is extant, space as a smashed and slit bleak painting of a rough surface called inter-universe...”

“Wow! You’ve got to pass me along the how you call it, the reference...”

“But of course... But anyway, as photons have no mass but can still feel the gravitational pull of the Sun due to their dynamic mass, likewise the neurons... If...”

“Isn’t embarrassing to see the trite depressing melodrama of humanity...? The masses accepting with resignation the victory of blood and instinct (for true it is, isn’t it, that, as the guru explained, people don’t imagine life to be worth living without war,) while the illumined machinery studies stars in distant galaxies...? Who of both camps is in the wrong...? I was reading in a magazine just yesterday, I think, that a group of teamsters in a Detroit factory have taken but a bit of some new ultra-thin material called “graphene” — slivers of graphite, mind you, with the wideness of just an atom — and stretching it with tiny pliers and so on have been able as it were to paint a new universe... Meaning that in every atom a potential new universe lurks! The mind reels, doesn’t it? Inflexible jerks criticize personal foibles, but are the rotten at the core institutions which automatically select individuals who never gainsay the lies put forward by the same never analyzed institutions... All needs to be overhauled, and no less the same cosmos which we deludedly assume holds us, when it might well be, without being too skeptically solipsistic, that in each of us... But of course, you are right, Jippie’s case is even more outrageous...”

“Dear, and no shit. His mind not a pretty picture, the least one can say... Brooking no word of advice, waiting for no protestation that would inconvenience their self-appointed task, damned wrecking-balls of the edifices of the soul, the religiously afflicted cells proceed to scatter the leaves of the great book of Jippie’s mind, proceed to eliminate at random,

with coarse doodles and oblique frantic lines, a big deal of the perfectly legitimate words they meet with as they fall raging down the rapids of their crazy spree... Only their mute hoarse sardonic laughter is able to catch up with this disastrous avalanche... The painting of the universe in Jippie's mind now a bloody shambles, my pet..."

"You depict the symptoms with such poetry!"

"One must, or falls a-prey of despondency and madness. Bemoaning fate's military-like treacheries serves no purpose. Protecting the synapses, make the dendrites more able to withstand insults, that's the only ticket to fleeting salvation, my friend..., an elusive, illusory respite, what else can we hope for...?"

While Chuckeline rhapsodized, Coralline thought in passing about Jippie, Chuckeline's non-entity of a husband, a humble, rich, wriggly, drool-y sort of guy, putative father of the retarded bastard I married — well, all things considered, maybe not so putative after all... Both of them reticent pansies, and with a brain to match, full of fuming stercoraceous holes...

Sternly, her ex-mother-in-law cited from Horace or from somebody about supposing the shame she must endure among the rather worthless bunch of ignoramuses who must be holding the prohibited nostrums, energumens with no counsel worth its salt, scum-headed fellows who once they took her gold coins and slunk away, much as cursed replete bleeding hyenas would do, down to their pretentious hut or hole in the mud, Jippie's medicine safely in her hands, they next would blow all the hard-earned moneys in cheap no-account whores no doubt, and whiskies and whatnot, golf-clubs, fur stoles, mono-place airplanes, leisure submarines, impertinent appurtenances the miserable never knew how to handle properly, soberly enough, and never (no, god forbid) in the service of humanity, now possibly afflicted with a new brain-liquefying pandemic of intergalactic proportions or so...

As for Jippie's plight, who knew; not that the deterioration was too noticeable, as she had already said, but funerals and inheritances and additional taxes cost lots of money. That's why.

“Anyhow, honeydew, I wisely consulted with a consummated sage and he recommends those pills... Those pills, willy-nilly, fall-who-may... Extract of abyssal fish electricity..., mixed with so-called abusive substances..., and the hell if I remember what else... He wrote it down here in this chit... Capitis dolorem remediatur torpedo nigra viva inposita eo loco... Ache of head is remedied by the black abyssal fish when alive is posited upon the freaking place... Numbness ensues which purports indubitable healing...”

“Listen, mama love, a shifty acquaintance of mine, a worthless thug, also a fairy, he’s at my service, for little silly peccadilloes like that...”

“Oh really...? If you could make him...?”

“I’ll call on him tomorrow, think of it as done.”

“Poor Jippie! He was always so fond of you. He’d worry that little crooked worm between his legs to death, for days on end, swimming in piles and piles of your dirty underwear, that he would filch from the hamper...”

“Devil Jippie, shitty guy...”

“And now with his awkward malady; unpresentable, you know...?”

“I do; he was always so scarecrow-y, always unseasonable, fashion-wise, you might say..., but now, I imagine, it’s got to be much worse...”

“Dear, if you only knew! A prairie-wide spate of prominent outright inconveniencies... A rapidly shrinking brain, a diabolic mechanism by which brain cells are damaged, inflammation occurs, nerve impulses that are passed between cells during routine activities like learning and memory become totally toxic, a chronic neuro-degenerative disease that, instead of triggering the formation of memories, triggers fickle impulses that inflict irreparable injury on neurons and disrupts the neurologic and cardiovascular functions. Those hazardous cells, as the bigoted rider that rides down-hill straight to his grave, have an incredible arrogance, their misanthropic hubris grows every hour at least a few audible notches, too confident in their victory when the all-out attack on neurological functions

has been splittingly sounded. Understanding this mechanism, my sage proposes in consequence a strategy of chemical preconditioning in order to induce adaptations in nerve cells that would perhaps enable the cells to better withstand toxic attacks and thus prevent injury and insult. I said: Quite, I get you, preconditioning allows the nervous system to experience stress and this experience make it more resistant to future encounters with stress and the damage it can trigger... He said: Take that nasty villain, glutamate, an amino acid that normally acts as a neurotransmitter... I said: Isn't that what the Chinks put in their disgusting concoctions...? No wonder they all appear to be so brainless..."

"And boneless, you might have added... Except that all of them are each a single ambulant dick... They look like dicks, they act like dicks..."

"Quite. But anyway glutamate overly excites the hapless neurons, those neurons that were more happy enjoying their rest, unawares, hanging ten for a min, causing damage and death wholesale among them, a process yclept excito-toxicity. Then the crooked branches of neurons that carry impulses toward the body of the nerve cell, the dendrites, and the places where impulses pass from neuron to neuron, the synapses, say, altogether now, what the hell is happening here, are we deranged, ma'am...? This they curiously inquire, heaving with the pangs and rattles of agony, and the diseased Jippie, or whoever the cripple be, who is attained with that sanctimonious plague, mad as a hatter, in his enraged head, he shouts all sort of dirty foreign words; you have to put him in isolation, into a cork-walled and mattress-walled room, until death doth make him freaking pipe down..."

"Though how humane and considerate the touch of the many mattresses, indeed."

"It seems that in lab studies brain cells are bombarded, wait a minute, with diazoxide and memantine, drugs used in ischemic heart disease, and in strokes, and blockers of glutamate receptors to boot... I hope I have the notes well arranged; however, all those concepts of sneak blitzzy attack to the exposed vulnerable little silly body, how dreary and horrible, don't you think...? Furthermore, as the sages say, lab studies show also that elevated levels of PAF promote beading on dendrites and wound, as with tiny Injun's arrows, the synapses, this after a series of bursts of synaptic activity similar to those that appear involved in learning and memory... I tell you,

you tell me, how bitchy can nature get! Jippie's thing characterizes itself especially by swelling and beading and loss of the spines of the dendrites... The brain shrinks awfully, I've already said that, and that malignant fellow PAF, platelet-activating factor, which is a compound that promotes inflammation and plays the role of the ubiquitous clown in the brain, can be produced by neurons and takes part in the workings and other shenanigans of synapses... Immune cells gone bonkers, producing it during the unmanageable mirroring inflammations... If you happen to have it in the industrial magnitudes that Jippie carries it, them, him, hers, whatever..., the point is: that zero learning ensues, and zero remembering also..."

"Everything's so awful, darling."

"Bummer, you know; what else can you say...?"

"Damn, tell me about it... And my head's aching also... Listen, to change the subject...; since coming home and recalling the famous nights at the island mountains... I'm a bit frisky...? It's a long trip from the shopping center, know what I mean...? Again in my mind the travelogue of dreams, of polished bronze dreams... Feelers of pleasure, buzzing, twinkling, with such vigor and stamina... Up! Brazen bronze feelers of pleasure, up, up, up! Shiny feathers of her snatch, preened, tongue-preened...! That I'm telling myself, darling, aloft, while driving, driveling almost, in a cloud, enmeshed in vapors of lewdness, and, dear mama love, who, but who, such a long trip, the thighs so tight, who, the juices flowing, the brain showing again the dreamy picture, the nose, who, the nose smelling the salty sourly..., the buds tasting..., yeah, who could resist it...?"

They embraced, so captivatively...

And now Nina also came. A threesome...

And now Nina also came... And now Nina also...

7.

The bell at the door rang. “You-whooo...! Maximine am apparat...!” Maximine yelled from the landing behind door.

Nina went to open. For once she was beaming. She was also a bit tipsy. Today there was a party, a farewell party for Chuckeline, a farewell, and also a till we meet again, soon, we hope, party, as Coralline had put it. Champagne was flowing.

These last three weeks had been, as they say, momentous...? In Chuckeline’s pocket there was at least a year’s allowance of the magic electrical pills...

Chuck the Contortionist Chink had been maimed for good...

Regarding this last item, Maximine, upon being appraised of it, had suspected something..., “something fishy,” she said, but she was given to peruse a little notice in a blog assumingly kept by a circus employee... An elephant, a she-elephant in musth, had crushed Twig Withy’s legs, and not by any means, no way, by any sort of dirty trick had the accidental crushing take place, no, sir... And next the issue became wrinkles and dry skin, and itchy peelings in the inner linings of the orifices, and not due against undue, or ethical arguments for imperative analysis against laissez-faire justice for the leisured classes, or formulaic trial and harsh process against sundry dastardly misdeeds...

Now everyone more or less found herself willing hostage to the intoxicating fumes of good wine and good pot. Halting on many tongues the words of great fashion-makers, plus here and there, scattered for balance and façade-building and good taste, also the name of a striking philosopher or two had to pop. If the construction of the last sentence jars somewhat, if it sounds a bit Germanic, maybe it has to be with Coralline’s readings of late. Spengler, Nietzsche, Fichte, Brahms, Listz, Arcimboldo, or whoever the Kant...

She just crushed a numb winter fly with her hand. "Ach, es klebt Blut an meinen Händen...", she said. Nina, her vacant air of the unversed blonde melted away, her doll's face now tinkling and sparkling, mirroring perhaps her soul's innate bend for rioting now reawakened, or let's say her inborn genius for partying, hmm, reignited..., laughed her head off. "Is that French...? All the French are faggots," she said.

Nobody objected to the blanket indictment. Whether the reason for the lack of any challenge to the statement was that all of them agreed to it or not, who knows. Consciences were abdicating their right to moderate. Every silly phrase could be construed as something else. We, that is, they were overwhelmed by a tremendous feeling of exultation. There were tacked up on one of the walls a few very distressing photos of elderly people and housewives and babies, who, after they had been fired upon by our heroic unimpeachable troops with a few rounds of white phosphorous shells, were rotting in situ. A murderous substance built in principle to burn through metal bunkers, now had been hurled at them and had melted their skin and flesh in a tick. A screen of fire that couldn't be extinguished with water had enveloped them all of a sudden...

"Wünsche und Hoffnungen können durch aussen kommende brutale Geschehen plötzlich vernichtet werden... Man, and how true!" Had commented Coralline.

And now Maximine was talking about the ignis fatuus ensconced in the fabric of the soul of even the most slavishly submissive and least arrogant of god's children.

A very young girl, a neighbor, a close friend of Nina's, talked about her dream. "Strangely out of date," Chuckeline said, "More likely to have been dreamed by somebody my age..."

"Maybe archetypal, then," the giggly girl said.

A tenuous blanket of deadly radioactivity was hovering above every surface of the globe, the sphere, the planet indeed... Planet, shrouded traveler of the desolate asphyxiated firmament, as the grim sickle-carrier, spitting bezoars of hatred, tawdry sorcerer, surveyed the utter destruction,

everything poisoned, barren, trodden down by the exterminating pall, wretched, heinous, every ex-organism nothing but a discarnate flaw on the sorrowful ruins... A hobbled planet indeed, enveloped in a dull fine kill-all matte shroud of lethal dust...

Nobody gave a damn whether the deadly pall now inerasably lurking above the doomed Earth, instead of the lively and lovely polychrome atmosphere of yesteryear, should've been really gray, rather than purple or maybe greenish... No, too late. Past time to talk of fashion and color tones... Too drunk everyone.

An immense sense of euphoria suffusing the sisterhood... "I'm gradually leaking away," Nina said, for after laughing so hard for so long she at last noticed that, by tiny bouts, she had been pissing herself over and through. She put the bottle back on the shelf and went to fetch a towel, or perhaps she went to change her underwear...?

The pretty neighbor, who worked in the city's tax office, said she had never had so much fun in her life. That sisterhood is life. That men are lice, lying lice, of course. "Steer a careful course clear between the realms of lice and the realms of fleas. Women are much cleaner," she concluded.

She, her name was Naveline, was almost 21. A circumspect wisp of a girl, she nonetheless packed a wallop. Her breakfasts were gargantuan, full of fortifiers, and vitamins, and special muscling chocolates. "Those pesky teasers, the Aztecs," she said, "reserved the whole crop just for the warriors..."

"Warriors, eh? It must have been the heroin of yore," commented Maximine.

Naveline added: "A handful of cacao beans could buy you the services of a courtesan, or of eleven skunky whores, your choice..."

Most of the party laughed at the quip. The bacchantes were all at the edge of inner collapse. They were recruits for the next battle of the naked ladies. Everybody was starting to shove and elbow everybody else...

Feeling randy, Naveline corralled Coralline and tried to woo her, “What about those terrifying photos? The pathos, not true? It eats at the fabric.”

“Huh...?” Said Coralline, perhaps too far gone. “Ah, sorry, for a moment I thought you meant that he, the Greek fellow, was taking a sandwich to the factory, and then I thought he? whom? which Greek worker? and which factory?”

Naveline groaned. “Beware a woman scorned, and cave canem also,” she hissed, feeling as holy and justified for mayhem as another selfsame warrior.

Satanic Coralline ignored her. She went to another cluster of chicks talking animatedly about Duchamp’s Goss Selavie, a woman of weight and circumstance — a bit bitchy, but how can you command any respect without bitchiness, I ask you...?

In a strangely strangled voice the elder of the party, the honored granddame, nonchalantly tossed apart all those cluster bombs and Molotov cocktails, and viciously attacked...

“That faggot, Voltaire!”

“I love Voltaire,” jumped again Coralline.

“Well, he’s flaunting a highfalutin’ chick’s name also, doesn’t he?”

“Is it...?”

“What...?”

“A female’s name, Voltaire.” And without giving Chuckeline space for a retort, Coralline continued, apparently in high dudgeon, or at least peeved: “If your son wouldn’t have been a faggot himself, maybe I would have a

precious daughter by now. I would've called her Voltaire..." She said, and added, as an afterthought: "And her sister Céline."

"Well, bully for you!" Spat the stately matron.

"Are you two crossed...?" Asked, a bit concerned, Maximine.

Nina intervened, dismissing the spat. "Lovers' spat," in a mellow voice she dreamily recited... "I'm lost in a reverie of harmonious womankind sailing in the vaginal interstices of the music of the spheres up above among the milky tit galaxies," she certified.

"He's adopted," Dropped the elder statewoman, deadly grave, as somebody who, not drunk this time, drops a bomb.

"Who, Molière...? I mean Voltaire...?" Coralline was ready to jest.

"Dick," answered the beautiful dowager queen.

It was a shock. Unbelievable. Coralline sputtered: "Dick's adopted...? Your son...? But he looks so much as Jippie the wreck, I mean, sorry, his father..."

"The guy's so mean! Now it stands to reason. Coming from a background of degenerates..." Manifested, somehow highly vindicated, Maximine.

But Chuckeline said, and somewhat solemn too: "He's adopted. An uncle of him had him, or rather a courtesan he knew, the uncle, Jaffie...?"

"Jaffie the uncle is the dad...?"

"Yep."

"Is he also rich...?"

“Nope, not any more. Spent it all on whores, then he died.”

“Another hero gone to greener pastures...” Epitaphed Coralline.

“Viridis is the name...” Stepped in Maximine.

A bit shrill Nina inquired: “The name of what...?”

“The name for green, meaning also strong, vigorous, full of stamina and possibilities, all fresh.”

“And very fresh he was with the ladies, too.”

“In fine, the fresh to the fresh...” Re-epitaphed Coralline.

Finished Chuckeline: “...pastures.” Then added: “And how appropriate too. He had a yen for fritillaries, and guinea-hen flowers, adobe-lilies, crown-imperials... The lot of the fritillaria family... Alas, his only humanizing trait.”

“Well, if we ever visit his grave, we know what to put on it.”

“A period, if it has snowed,” quipped, classically, Maximine.

The general laugh was curtailed by Chuckeline’s continuation on the same theme, a slight variation perhaps: “The day I came to the city for Jippie’s pills I told Dick. He’s old enough to know.”

“In his bloody forties,” bitterly interjected Coralline.

“He went bananas, he protested his raped innocence. I said, you are too old to be raped. He said he had always felt unloved. He said, and yet now I still

feel more unloved. He said, I'm going to commit suicide. He started crying... I told him, spare me the touchy shit... He heard the word shit and became scandalized. I said: I said spare me the touchy shit, hypocritical bourgeois old fascistic lady...! People like you make me sick! Always bringing down the world to the level of beasts! He childishly banged his head on the wall, said he would retire forever into some dismal crypt to live with corpses... I said creep is the word all right... He went for a broom... Shitty boy... I hoofed it out of there faster than if I had a sniper at my tail..."

"But... But what about Jippie...? Didn't the two of you... Couldn't you two... I'm at a loss..." Coralline stuttered, "is he impotent...?"

"Don't think so, he loves all kinds of animals..."

"Gross!" Shouted Nina. Maximine remarked: "Here come again the green pastures."

Said Chuckeline: "Never had sex with him."

"Grosser!"

"Miracles were needed to bring me to submit to the flingy hangy stringy thingy of his..."

"Grossest!"

"A piggie's..."

"Eek!"

"...and grunting after the fragrant flavorsome truffle of my cunt..."

"Weeee...!" We all, that is, they all exulted.

“...if ever he touched me, the stark fabric of my soul felt torn apart by two contradictory instincts, the instinct to flee, the instinct to kill him.”

“So dramatic!” Said Nina.

“Well, dear, everybody goes through the same quandary...” Mollified Coralline.

Plus, more words of consolation poured from the two others... The four of them felt bolstered by each other’s company. Plenty of kisses and hugs were exchanged.

True, today’s the day Chuckeline goes back to the sticks... She is due to board the plane at a tick or two before midnight and skedaddle among the clouds back to the prairie... She has to nurse the wretched idiot Jippie — she’ll do it at arm’s length, surely, and through the mediation of the help. She has to tend (much more a-near and lovingly this time) her spate of lively manly horses... Duty calls, it can’t be antedated, you know.

La fidélité au devoir... (how goes the faggoty ditty...?) ...est fatale comme l’orgueil de la menstruation est fatale a la fidélité...? How does it go...? Hanged as a hangnail (the horror!) now if we know.

It was only quarter to nine.

8.

As Coralline was rhapsodizing that thank goodness during these three or four weeks they had enough span of space to flourish, and that the sweet memories would linger forever, Ralph, Naveline’s daddy, rang at the door. He had been hired, or rather commissioned, to taxi Chuckeline to the airport.

Coralline kissed Chuckeline good by, so did Nina and Maximine, and so did a few of the others, actually the whole of them did, yeah, the whole shebang, after the she-bang fest, get it?

Truth is nobody wants to say good-bye to such a dear close friend, nobody wants to cry (and it makes you so ugly and splotchy, and under those harsh wobbly droning lights, goodness!) nobody want to bawl her head off at sentimental farewells among uncouth critters in such awkward-looking (it is rather more like a butcher-shop) locale as an airport, plus of course nobody wants to drive drunk.

Though cartoonish in his appearance, Ralph is not fictional. Yesterday after he got home Coralline had called. He had always been a flaccid though inquisitive boy. Mamas' tummies always had interested him. His yellow hairless oily skin that enveloped so much surplus fat made him slightly repellent to all and sundry. And his minuscule shaftlet had not shivered at the gentle strokes of anybody's puffy hands but his own. The scant blood-stained product of each of his millions of orgasms had onanistically fallen on his lap. Warm spurts, a cushiony butt, hugging some cloth... Trying maybe as a game to manage for once to spray his nipples with his spawn, his seed, but not, his brittle jism never raising to the occasion. Oh, well, rinse yourself off and back to the stalls, straddle the benches, take big volumes of law lore, memorize the cases one by one, link them with the linking sparkling cells in the file and fliers containers of the brain, row after row, and don't worry if your step-daughter sees you naked and laughs. Or your wife transforming the bedroom not in a nook for pleasure but in a photo lab, there in the red light, a shade, a specter, sinister, and yet so unattainably sexy, passing soapy slides in unison, thousands of them, before you fall asleep, and your dreams hook onto the same phantasmagoria.

"Honey, I'm overflowing with spunk..."

Swallow up the licks of life, and swim through its bumps, what else, never strutting, what for, but never guilt-ridden neither, lopping off the excess bunk, dumping the mean and the meaningless, ignoring each complication of life, like with Occam's scissors, or razor, fuck politics, compromises, credos, charities, never pay attention to the babbling of the needy shitty liars on top, businessmen of death. Instead keep your quizzical eyes,

enamored, enamoring, fixed on the gorgeous gals (their wobbly globes, juicy crannies, their fleshy baits, your firmament) everywhere, at the office, on the screens, and the photos, and the internet and the magazines, and behind the curtains of the neighbors' windows.

Nothing hurts..., with the prosaic exception, broadly speaking, of your common diabetic ills. We'll be moving soon to the inserting of tubes and machinery, and to surgery to feet and whatnot. But no, no spiritual aches to speak off. He composes poetry to his butch of a wife with lines full of legal lingo.

Knocks me out of my jockeys, is pleading for the payees, as I come and come a-knocking, and nobody heeds my poking.

Being so fond of fondling, the wall with my back to, tears of ex post facto, flow over the requisites. Ah, languors exquisite, as my cervix whimpers, and to kneeling it me leads, as I squeeze the roll of morn, before the steaming of the milks.

And the coffee's on the custody, of the court of my hands, that from the breakfast table, would fain jump avault, as the rhythm gets outrageous, outrageously arch for my age, the rhythm of my heart for thee, but who's so mean and abusive, wants to adduce res ipsa loquitur for the accident of my (awkward too) silly demise unobtrusive...? Not me!

Well, here he is now, in this odorous nest of female debauchery. And it smells cunt, the atmosphere thick with the tasty smell of cunt, cunt all over, spread thick, like levels and slices of paradise, whoo-ee, so heavenly delicious. Ah, what wouldn't he had given to be invited in like Naveline. He the meticulous petty-foggerish bacchanal's inspector — let's line them up, gallery of rogues, in the buff — inspector closely peering at the heavy-scented gallery of rogues's rugs... He's been behind the entrance door trying to spy, trying to eavesdrop... Hey, picking up scents, shouts, moans, words... And if he had his druthers, maybe he'd also do more, even, maybe, yes, shag a few of those delightful dykes, maybe not for starters the too hoggy ones, but a gig or two with the more svelte and stylish why not, why not indeed, god, why not, yes, Coralline herself, wow. I'm in slavering idiot love for her all told.

“What?” he said.

“I said thanks for the favor,” Coralline repeated, and perhaps, or surely, she was too smashed to notice how gassy Ralph’s bulbous hands trembled.

“Anyway, here’s my dear mama, take good care of her. You can pick back Naveline when you return. She’s already fallen asleep on the couch.”

But Ralph was very stubborn here. He had to take the girl with him for the ride. She hoisted the wispy girl on his arms, and staggering down the stair they went.

Once inside the car, already on the streets before hitting the road, and with Naveline unfortunately snoring at the back, and Ralph frowning a little, a little disconcerted by the turn of events, Chuckeline, only for politeness sake inquired: “Where are you from? Ralph is it...? You are so greenish and plump and glabrous... Are you sick? Are you a Chinese...?”

“Oh, Chinese, oh, but only partly. Totally diabetic also, if you’d care to consider the condition in an ethnic way. Ah, and partly Catalanian also, am I...?”

“Catalonian? What are those?”

“Well, these are people, for starters; not a sickness or the name of any kind of sausage, not even a cake, as the Danish are... Ha-ha,” he poorly joked. As Chuckeline failed to say nothing, he proceeded: “And they are supposed to be very good drivers, also,” he again joked.

“I thought they were already extinguished, like the dinosaurs, exterminated, annihilated, like vermin... In any case, they are so damned obscure, they don’t appear even to have a bad nickname, a tag... How do you call it, a racial blur of a slur, so-called, to distinguish them from the rest of them spooks...”

Good natured Ralph agreed to the whole manifesto, with a few, ah, preclusions, let’s say, though, with only with a tiny wiggle of modifiers.... “You are right, no specific soubriquet, we got none, alas, directly targeted

at us — and how we miss it — what wouldn't one give to have one, established and thriving, signal sign that you've arrived, stuck into the conscience of the commonality — one of them endearing epithets — the kikes, the guineas, the wogs..., they don't know how lucky they are, the ofays even — all those howls of recognizance, called sometimes, or taken to be often, for somewhat offensive by groups of idiots, and propagandists and people of little lights (not of literary, but of litter instruction, ha-ha.) Or maybe it is because you can only say good about us; by the way, Voltaire himself..."

"You too read Voltaire...? A foreigner? A fellow who drives people around...? And by the way where are you taking that poor clueless doll...? If you don't find me too rude for asking."

"You bet. Not at all. She's my daughter. I'm one of Coralline's neighbors...? I thought they told you at the party."

"Well, if they did, I don't always listen, damned beaky parrots."

"And then of course I'm a lawyer. For the city department of taxes? And indeed not a foreigner. Never. At least fifth generation American, ok? From any side you care to gauge. Neither a taxi driver, it goes without saying. Coralline asked me to drive you to the airport. She wouldn't trust a foreigner for such a hazardous trip. All those greasy spics..."

"I hate spics."

"Dear, who doesn't."

"Dirty bastards."

"And anyway... Hmm, if you'd pardon me, how to put it...? I wanted to talk with you, such an example of successful accomplished womanhood... Hem-hem, such a well-sat woman, so well-sat in the head, I mean, and with Naveline here present, as I say, you being such a happily married lady and all... Of course unless you object, er..., does the point raise ethical questions...?"

“Which point...? It’s just that I’m fagged out.”

“Hem..., no doubt. And me the more envious for it.”

“What...?”

Does the old girl see him as a hideous object to be stashed out of the way? It has all the looks to it of being so. This uncomfortable feeling was irking the ugly guy...

“Well, and then... With Naveline having such a reverend respect for you, and then how heroic you were, are..., how you came to the polluted city from the clean and atmospheric stinks, I mean sticks, just to get some cure-all pills for you ailing husband. Permit me to talk a bit loud, maybe like this we’ll impress some of the wisdom into the dormant maiden...”

And here Ralph became loud indeed, stentorian even. “So, that was my question, wouldn’t you recommend also a bit of experimentation for any self-respecting woman — she’s almost 21, Naveline! — and she’s girl-girl bound, so female-oriented, never seen her with a guy, a fellow with a ready cuck to wiggle, eh? — and without men, don’t you agree, dear wisdom-loaded elder signora, well, the world is hardly complete, is it...? And what a dearth of experience if you ever do entirely without!”

He stopped as he glanced at the grimacing old woman, who had stoppered her left ear with both of her gloves.

“Sorry...” Said Ralph, meek as an overfed dog. He continued after ten minutes, in a very soft catty voice. “Glad I volunteered, anyway. The incommensurable pleasure of such delightful company. My intention at the background being not only to ask you about life, you such a respected role-model, for her benefit, but also for the contact it affords. Our proximity building self-confidence and muscling up the soul... Only your scent reviving and propping up my most intimate integuments... I’ve admired you always so deeply...”

“All this sounds so creepy!”

“Sorry again.”

In her unquiet sleep the girl wails, then giggles, lifts up, looks at them with blind wide open eyes. She smiles without seeing. Then collapses in a knot of loopy extremities. Except that she apparently likes it. She’s laid herself down in a better, more curled up position. She mumbles, she groans with pleasure.

“...who wouldn’t admire such a plucky and beautiful lady? Heroic, in a word, all told, heroic. Epical. This perilous crisscrossing across town, wallowing in the blood of so many thousand pussy punks. What is there no to admire? The ethical undertow of it all, the saving of the ailing husband...”

“Cut the crap, please.”

“Sorry, but don’t you agree, with respect to Naveline? After all, most moneys are in the pockets of men. If she doesn’t marry, what’s her life... A worse poverty...? I know you can marry poor, but she’s got excellent brains. She can marry rich, or moderately so, I’m sure...” A pause. No reply. “I always try to coach her. Women, even when not blonde, have to have a repertory of moues, a moue for every occasion, I was going to say... If you’ll pardon the slight rudeness... For every cock-asion, but I don’t want a be racist, ha-ha. Or genderist..., gender-inimical. There is... There is this adage of the Sybille... She always says it... The Sybille, she’s so down-to-earth, so eh..., Eve-like, practical, let’s munch the apple, let’s gnaw the bloody rib off, and we’ll see, you know...?”

“Sybille. Is that the oracle, the sibyl that declares that nobody escapes her fate...?”

“No, gracious, no. Sybille, my wife, she says that a woman’s bodily constitution destines her to passivity and...”

“It’s the fucking same thing.”

“Right you are. Well, what do you know. The name predetermining your character again, eh...? Ralph... What does it say? A dog’s name, lapping it up. But the Sybille, my wife, well, she with her interminable photographing of people’s faces, she claims she’s come to know all characters through physiognomies... Seriously, she contends she’s serious... Now and then the real faces surfacing, you know. People’s souls coming up in the negative and the print, huh...? For instance (I hope you don’t offend easy,) when she photographs churches’ groups...”

“Church-goers. So mean. They give me the willies.”

“Well then! Plenty of Satan-seeing eyes there, plenty of red flaming eyes, if you know what I mean. So the Sybille says also. Churches always being where the nastier people congregate, those that push the killers to wars of greed and conquest, and cram the killers into the police stations, and the state attorneys’ and the public prosecutors’ and state executioners’ offices...”

“Tax departments.”

“Of course, without taxes you wouldn’t have fine roads. You wouldn’t have fine national parks. All those prairies where the wild horses roam... But, the Sybille, lovely woman, she has a photographic concession at the mall, a little tiny stall, she hustles up and down the aisles, sometimes she nails a commission to go elsewhere, churches, schools, end of season matches... Business not so good now with all those digital cameras, but anyway...”

Now they were immersed in darkness, cruising steadily along the solitary long straight road. Ralph coughed. Stuttered. “I hope... I hope you don’t find me too much of a scheming bastard. Trying to put over this... As... Eh... Sneaky... Pretending it to a neighborly benevolent favor, when in reality it was all done in order to extract wisdom and counsel from such an eminent personage, for the benefit of my tyro daughter...”

“Oh, skip it, no sweat.”

“Do you love dance...?”

“What...?”

“I mean ballet. Talking about cakes. What about that choreographer David Parsons...?”

“I love him! I didn’t know you were a ballet buff.”

“A buff alright. Mummy, and their buffs!”

“What?”

“I’m a sucker for ballet — love the women, love the men. Firm abs, firm glutes, and the thighs...! A dream.”

“Which ballet have you been to lately...”

“I love opera too...”

“Did you see that thing they did with Le Corsaire...? I’m glad we have this thing in common...”

“We have also our love for philosophers, remember.”

“Me, philosophers, no. Voltaire as a litterateur...”

“So I heard you.” Of course he had not so much heard as eavesdropped it.

“On the hand Coralline..., she’s very philosophical these days.”

“Ah, yes, your stepdaughter.”

“She’s not my stepdaughter.”

“Naveline is mine.” How quaint to put it like that, witty Ralph. “We talked the other day about Marcion with the double god, and about Morpion and his theory of parasitism of the soul by angels so tiny no cat-scan could detect, and about Meinong, ah Meinong! Said Coralline, I love him, for he demonstrates that to exist is not enough, that you’ve also got to be, and that you can be without existing and contrariwise, quod erat demonstrandum.”

“Yeah, quite.”

“What a pity. Such a high-octane conversation between two highly graded individuals. And the daughter too tight.” Quaint indeed. “Silly girl asleep the whole of the trip, too inebriated... So much she could have learned! Could have taken critical advantage from the serious conversation between this two too reasonable adults... Like all these arguments I had in my head, ready to shoot. Sperm of wisdom all over. Like the indubitable theme that abortion frees the body, no more drudgery, no more slavery, the woman no longer a prisoner, gone the days one had to put up with the unwanted tumor of a pregnancy... Like a malignant stupid turd gone askew, and which destroys you life... Instead, now, with all those modern freedoms, why wouldn’t then she risk a little bit of trying also a cuck, I mean a cock or two...? Where’s the harm...?”

“Where indeed. Coralline married my son Dick and now she knows what is like and what does she prefer, whether she wants to go that way or that...”

“And though for the moment she’s chosen the way not of the cucky or cocky flesh but of the sisterly cozy fold engulfing the flavors, not so much the sausage as the omelets, the convex as the concave...”

“No, but wait, I was thinking, in a philosophical way also, that... If it is true, as yourself and the bulk of the hoary philosophers claim, experience breeds reason, it stands to it, that the trick is to outlive them all and thus become wiser and wiser — wiser than them too... Wise than the oldest of them...”

“Exactly, that’s what’s to be aimed for in life. Outliving the wisest. Damn, ma’am! How limber in your neuronizing, you could’ve been a perfect, and perfectly tough, tough heavy-case trial lawyer, or even, also, a surrogate judge in billionaires’ inheritance cunundra. Such finesse!”

“Oh, come on, you make too much of it, quit the brownnosing.”

“I wished!”

“What...?”

“Nothing... Er... I would have liked it so much if you could have talked to Naveline woman to woman. Her mother is a horse, if you’ll pardon me. She knows nothing about femininity. The reverse of you, such a model, you could be modeling also in the long walks of fashion, so famously well-built... You must know a lot about seduction, and about the bodily functions... It always moved me very much, er..., les irrégularités de la menstruation des jeunes filles... If you know what I mean. What a wasted opportunity for everybody involved in the case!”

“Which case?”

“Sorry, professional turpitude...” Ralph, he was a bit at a loss. His car also was a bit doubtful on the smooth black pavement. It kept wavering. Faintly shimmering like a specter lost in the dense darkness. “It occurred to me, sorry to change the subject. We are happy people, especially the men, all cuckolds.”

“Who...?”

“The Catalonians.”

“Ah... All the Catalonians cuckolds, eh...? Ah! But do you know Old Cuck...? Old Cuck is the god of cuckoldry, according to the philosopher Voltaire...”

“But he’s a frog. All frogs are faggots.”

“Indeed, so are all the wops, but anyway..., what he says is often so deep...”

“Yeah, so reasonable. One would want him any day for his philosopher king. Instead of all those crackpot blood-crazy profiteers we get in government those days...”

“Anyway, Voltaire, he said: Old Cuck, the god of cuckoldry, the only god I have faith in...”

“Well, how apposite, eh? For us, I mean, the Catalonians. Old Cuck our god plus... Yeah, by the way, cuck is also the way we name the prick.”

“The prick’s name is cuck in Catalanian...? How picturesque! Such swank anecdotes you learn driving along with foreign exotic taxi drivers! I thought your mispronunciation of the word cock was due to your wog-ness — wogness, damn, such a disfiguring affliction.”

Ralph felt a little bit stung by the perfumed lady’s lack of consideration. He remained sullen for a spell. Then he revived...

“We aren’t so obscure as all that, the Catalanian-American, I mean. The Chink-American neither, but anyway name a Chinese-American of note, name a Catalanian one... Everybody stumped. And yet damn-the-torpedoes Farrago-Farragut was a Catalanian, and so were the writers Beet-Benét and Nan-Nin, and plenty of fellows in the early days, Sera-Serra, governors Argument-Agramunt and Portola-Portolà, and so on..., plenty painters, architects, doctors, scientists, cinematic actors, circus stars, the lot, like every other race, bohunk-y or not, oriental or oceanic, or native from one or another place... But Voltaire, who was also always so nice to kikes, made us the honor of calling us, in no uncertain admiring terms, the toughest and unruliest of the Europeans...!”

“Now, did he...?” The old gal sounding very tired.

The conversation bored her, Catalonians, Afghans, Kurds, Bengalis, Tibetans, whatever... Undistinguishable bunches of low-class crawlies, lousy, scurvies-ridden, never quite there... A wave of her weary hand, a blanket dismissal...

Ralph realized too late he was being, as always, a leaden boring fathead... Bah, and no hope to score even with the old scrawny lady.

“Sorry,” he said.

Sorry. Last thing ever he said too.

For at that moment, out of nowhere, came desperately snarling, bearing on them, gigantically tearing at them, like the sucking fiery mouth of an infinite yellow blinding dragon, a roaring rudderless truck...

9.

At Chuckeline’s funeral service, Coralline said, among plenty of other mistaken facts, that the deceased had the gift of the goddesses, that her ubiquitous and quieting words were enough indeed to cure ills, severe and ingrained though they be, and that her touch was mesmerizing, like unto a thaumaturge’s, by waves microscopic miraculous..., and that, upon seeing her, everyone suddenly felt impelled to ask her shiny ascending virginal likeness — rief ihr plötzlich jemand zu, she said, stressing the plötz and the zu to levels unheard — what was the sense and purpose of life, for they knew she was on the secret only goddesses master, and so on...

A “universalian priest” had talked very inspiringly about life’s shallow little holes..., all shallow, all identical but for a span or two of negligible depth, tiny nothings of pores, tiny pores of nothing, speckling all but invisibly and only in an itchy rash-like span of its interminable immensity, the infinite, and infinitely deep fabric of living... Parasites of non-being, he called

everybody, and everybody appreciated the compliment. Most of those in attendance were blandly smiling. Not exactly beaming, but warm in their expensive overcoats, and thinking inner thoughts of clever, manageable survival.

We, that is they were all acquired to his deep-fathoming poetry...

At Chuckeline's funeral service, held on the graveyard grounds during a glorious early winter noon, Coralline had tried to keep Maximine away from Chuck. For as Dick, her ex, the son of the deceased, was there, so was Chuck, their ex-lover, looking pitiful in his wheelchair, nervously gnawing at imaginary hangnails.

"Don't talk to the Chink, please; we are very loggerheadish those days, I'm still stung by his bastardry..."

She had tried indeed hard. Alas, unsuccessfully. She was talking about Chuckeline's incredible saintliness, how once she was petulantly pouting and the divine figure came to her help, and how since then... Elle gagne pour toujours la tendresse de sa bru... And how she felt a new woman after she was touched... When she saw her two enemies deep in heated converse, their two heads touching, never listening to a word she said.

"And after the stung frog, the stinging scorpion also drowned..." She was saying now, ad-libbing, trying to get the attention of her foe-friend. "Maximine, my faithful friend, of course, our mutual friend, faithful Maximine, like she faithfully said: Dragon-hued, yellowish, sickly-looking individuals can brutally railroad you out of existence, as this plötzliche vernichtung devil-sent truck did with her blessed life..."

She saw in horror the two of them animatedly coming to an understanding of sort, for both were excitedly nodding... Yes, that bungled her speech awfully. "That was a woman of merit and substance, pardi! I'm not only delivering a few heartfelt words of eulogy to the deceased, in honor of that great saintly woman, this I say, also, a warning to the living, what else can one say...? Saintliness and deviltries all mixed in the same flagon called life. In the same monkey-parrot, parrot-monkey cage called home, the globe of the ready to burst in a colossal bang, the earth of our forebears, and the

bears and the vixens too.”

Maximine, a Mormon, had been asking about the curom or else the curelom (though it had proved in this instance no cure for the poor homme, she joked) in musth who had terminated the contortionist’s poor legs.

“The what...?” The spunky Chink said.

“That’s how we Mormons call the elephants, curoms and cureloms.”

“Why the fucking complication?”

“Search me.”

“Willingly, but not here. Anyway it was no elephant that crushed my knees and legs. It was a fucking thug.”

“I knew it! Can you describe the heinous fiend?”

“What did you know...?”

“That the internet is all lies.”

“Is that so.”

“All those shitty bloggers spreading insane rumors... So who was the heinous brute...?”

“He had a baseball bat with him. He was ugly, fat, smelly..., a motorcyclist-clad creep. They give the bad name to faggot.”

“Indeed.”

“Though you know him...? Damned faggot, I find him I fry him, I pack a gun at all times, permit and all, they gave it to me when they saw it was foul play, and me the enormous, the biggest circus star of them all.”

“Yes, well, I’ll be on the lookout.”

“An elephant! No, I never went near the fucking repugnant beasts. I have always been terrified by elephants... My dad was a taxi driver from Brooklyn... He loved the circus. He loved the elephants most. He always (every weekend almost) invited me to go to the hallowed tent with him. I loathed elephants. How to tell him? Wasn’t I in a crude muddle...? So great a man you don’t take for granted easily, even if he comes home and slugs and shags your mom occasionally, or brings you a giddy gift, and then in a fit of further generosity strives to earn your appreciations, to touch and tinge with his sensitivity superior your more intimate introspections, alas the while endeavoring to rob you of your unransomed virginity too...”

“What a dreary proletarian existence!”

“Yeah, well. I took the straps of my boots and fucking pulled, didn’t I?”

“Indeed you did. Any Mormon worth his salt would agree.”

“Fuck the Mormons. All faggots.”

“How true, and polygamous into the bargain.”

“Anyway, give a hog anytime and not an elephant.”

“Hey, maybe curoms and cureloms are these...? A couple of types of hog, like the pig and the boar, and then the wildebeest, and... But in a gigantic measure, like in prehistory, and the time of the dinosaurs.”

“And the Catalonians, yeah, maybe, who knows; I don’t care shit for

religions.”

“Me neither. All faggots.”

“Who.”

“The religionists.”

“By all means. Anyway, my dad: Fall to earth, he told me. No point in enmeshing still the webs the extant possibilities secrete, sure-eyed already, even if to a seemingly imperceptible lift or slump or swerve or warp or loop or tiny pinch, when the threads of the universal lyre are already so forsakenly engaged in hostilities both each one against another and the lot against our senses, that the background sound cosmic barges in, shrill and illogical, through our unseasoned tympana — noise that maddens, without you introducing yet another absurdity — think clear means, think possible means, think civilized means, think scientific means, think artist...”

“He sure could talk fine for a rubbishy proletarian...”

“Well, perhaps I elaborate post-partum as it were. Anyway, he said: Forget the fucking hogs. Elephants are the real deal. Who could become a trainer, a howdah... How, da! That would be the life. No, wait, howdah’s the damned basket, I mean the basket-case fellow on top of the back of the devilish beast, the mahout, the driver. He such a consecrated lucky guy. Halfway to heaven, three quarters of the way. Almost there. To be near this maelstrom of humanity, it really reinforces your inclination to live. My mother was fat, a bit whalish if you will, and yet my father didn’t have enough — and smelling of heavily of fish, too, my mother... And not because whales are fishes.”

“They ain’t.”

“Who are you, another of these fucking jokers contradict the bible? Don’t you know the bible’s infallible? Just like the fucking pope. Don’t you know once the pope reneged on his word never to swear, he was cheated at cards by a gay bishop, and cursed: A plague on all those homos! And what do you

know, a plague came!”

“Indeed it did. Those holy people, they always get so freakingly right!”

“You bet your last egg they do. That’s why if the bible says a whale’s a fish, that’s what it is. But anyway the enormous fish smell came from another source, not from her whale-ness per se. Her cunt stank to heaven. She never washed, too big to wade into the bathtub... And she was too shy for the ocean.”

“Quite understandable. Only us shapely broads should be allowed at the beaches.”

“Conceited bitch. Where was I...? My dad, crazy for elephants, a fixation, a stupidity of his, one more. If he could’ve married an elephant, that would’ve made his day, his year, his whole stupid misspent life. An elephant, whether she or he no matter..., the point for him was bigness of flesh — what he called immense humanity enveloped... He talked like this, a bit warped, a bit Chinese. By the way, do Mormons permit that, the marrying to an elephant...?”

“Don’t have the foggiest. Is true they are all damned perverts, but I believe the skin-enveloped fleshy humanity must be able to be saved. Now, in cases of a human who is partly animal, like certain aborigines, then maybe they do an exception or two and your beastly ancestor can be writ into the tables of angelic salvation... Otherwise I doubt it.”

“What a load of shit.”

“Well, dogmas are dogmas. What can you do...? Chinks must be having their peculiarities too, they communicate, host-partake with dog flesh, I’m told.”

“All faggots. A propos of my dad’s infatuation with the huge mammoth thing... He craved to become a metallurgist... So maybe he could build himself a brazen she-elephant, to do like that crazed sexed queen of old... Desired to have her pleasure with a prize Chicago bull...”

“Penthesilea...?”

“Maybe. Or Pasiphae...? Or Xucletingia? O Potiphar...? O Pigpuddingia...? ”

“Yea, one of those...”

“Man, Greek names... All faggots.”

“Greek love.”

“My father, he wanted to be like the father of the guy got his wax wings burned... Diabolus, Daedalus... Fucking his son good... Splat when his wings melted... Another of them life-messing fashioners of useless contraptions... Leaf-blowers of hell... Yeah, who build the fucking cow...?”

“God?”

“The faggot. The metal one... The nameless wonder... And yet he, my dad, he never went near a foundry. Or a fucking anvil. He died a sloppy lazy taxi driver.”

“Not so bad. He could’ve become another deranged bus driver. One of those the don’t kill piecemeal but in droves. Dreams don’t ever come true. They are just dreams. You father a metallurgist, me a mode passerelle fashion queen. You try to go Dutch with fate, the god of destiny, but then he always welshes on you...”

“All those ethnic slanders, you should be ashamed.”

“Except that Chinks are worse. Nobody understands their farrago, but everybody knows they are laughing at everybody else. Damned bastards.”

“How true.”

“You understand them.”

“That’s how my father talked to me, in Chinese.”

“Really, how lucky! All those new connections in the brain.”

“Thank you. Well, as you see, limber in the neurons, limber in the muscle. All’s connected. Except that now I’m stuck into a fucking wheelchair.”

“Is really sad. And the cops...?”

“Fucking racists all.”

“Agreed.”

“I’ve hired a private dick.”

“You did. How terrible, how terribly clever... I have to tell Coralline, I have to tell everyone. Maybe we all can help...”

“How can you? Nothing to do with thugs, have you...?”

“Never. Just the pot providers. Cheap shits like these. Is the story of your father’s infatuation with the bestial mammoths over...? It sounded so traumatic.”

“Well, it was. I had to transfer the head of the godhead, as it were. Where a pig’s an elephant’s. And I was quite young and impressionable. Where my mother and her father both quite taken with the hog story of there native ancestry, my dad hammering in the idea of the divinity, or quasi-divinity of those queasy stinking huge beasts...”

“Is it telepathy...? When you said the godhead with the pig’s head, I saw that book with the stranded kids in the desert island. And they start worshipping the wild pig they slaughter. A pregnant sacrifice... How’s it call, there is also a film or two about the subject... All those murderous brats turned savages, worshipping the skeleton of a pig...”

“Well, dear, and who wouldn’t. And who doesn’t. My mom, the kikes, the stinking Saracens... They all make great to-dos with the pig, don’t they?”

“We just adore what we eat; we just eat what we adore.”

“Fine, how — how you call it...? — aphoristic. In fact we are all lost uselessly working at the same shit for all time. The same house with different bricks. Or the contrary. Different houses with the same bricks. You can’t escape what is.”

“Anyway, I see your horror, the elephantine terror... You torture-prone belt-wielding pathetic father warping your inborn spirit, from a nice well-adjusted piggie-directed little boy to a half-psychotic rubberman driven to love a strange greedy all-devouring malignant beast of a mammal, much more horrific, and worthless, just a walking immense abdomen, shitting non-stop, half-digested rubbish galore all around, stinking the place up...”

“I’m grateful for your heartfelt sympathy, I’m sure.”

“No, but no joking. I sympathize with your crippled legs, but I still fail to see where it jives. Your idiotic father stupid adoration for the huge critters and your non-accidental ‘accident.’ That you weren’t trampled by an elephant, didn’t exempt you. You were as if. You weren’t spared the plight that was yours to suffer. As everyone must suffer hers.”

“Cut the Greek tragedy crap.”

“But after all... You did as if. I mean, as if you suffered the plight you thought you were destined to suffer. Your fear of elephants, not to be overcome under their mountainous weight, makes you an athlete of fabulous conditions... You do it all (the excruciating training) in order just

so that you could escape the crazed blood-seeking animal running amok — as they do so often — and as you witnessed in the circus as a very small child, when you father brought you to see precisely those clumsy fat creeps...”

“Yes, yes. The insistence of my father. His criminal eagerness to convert me away from the pig fixation to the elephant dogma, surely all this left a nasty mark in my psyche, a sweltering festering wen in my liquefying brain... But the poetry of it all! Don’t you understand? How beautiful to be wanted. Visited by the pig-headed wish to make a damned convert out of you. How valuable you feel, how well-desired. Mormons of all people know that, proselytizing like gone goons, pestering people to become one of them fucking bastards. But for a child, a mere tyke... To be considered such a crucial cog in the chained becoming of so many people...? Grandfathers, totems, snakes, pigs... For a child fantasy is so overwhelmingly powerful!”

“I see where you are at.”

“Momentous to be cherished so much, taken into consideration, being one of them, even if taking a beating now and then... My father was a pig god himself then to me. A vulgar hackneyed father is already that. Almost no effort those first years. How much more if he takes such keen interest! This critical day... When my father revealed that amazing secret to me... That all my deepest, foundational beliefs were nothing but junk. Junk to junk away...? Toss your life to the fucking dickens...”

“Dickens, all this proletarian shit...”

“...and build yourself a new better one. Your own loving father your never perjured sponsor. It was all an eye opener. A soul blaster. That the silly tale of my grandfather’s soul-intermingling involvement with a hog (talk about miscegenation — and where’s the harm of it,) some huge tomato-sow full of her own sophistication — ‘wagging her sowish haunches,’ called the poet — a tale I was told to exhaustion since a baby barely able to listen — a generous ample swine, Boeotian if need be — Boeotian swine, Pindar’s famous address to Corinna, such an epic lay again, her own older poetry teacher (my hoggy mother’s) — the widest seen around these parts, a cow-sow — her it was my heavenly ancestor — the good goddess influence in my rooting life — me always looking for cents on the floors of wherever I went

— she, the sow-deity... The sow, the sow, my mother insisting, as her handkerchief-vendor of a lusk, lumbering, relaxed, slothful father had anxiously insisted — only instances he ever became anxious, defending his ancestry, those that were making his bed soft in heaven, the goddess sow at the front, most influential. A sow, then, and never, never — nervily: never! — my parents..., such a perennial fight about totems, totally irreconcilable later, when my father decided he needed a totem too, not to be outdone by those fucking faggots, the Injuns. A sow, then, in fine, and never such a cheap retrograde as something — moreover so exotic, savage, primitive — and uneducated — as this beast — whose motto is geographical destruction and spiritual stupidity for any casual survivor that there be left, standing, or rather crushed to death or half-death — either spatial or temporal — (the diabolical beast, meaning the flawless angelic lithe and graceful elephants, my father said, enthusing) — well, all that story was that: another lame little story, another stupid fable, another childish lie, like father Christmas, Jesus, Mahomet, Moses, Buddha..., all those figures, Lincoln, king Arthur the divine cuckold, all hogwash, indeed all swill, all many-colored turds floating in bilge... I said: Swell, now I'll have to identify with some other totem. Chinese are like this: totem here, totem there, otherwise they are not happy..."

"I know. The creeps."

"But he said, shit, don't you see it? Do like me, the elephant's it. We were on our cottage's scrawny lawn, surrounded by our unanimously lugubrious cathedral-decoys... — the whale my mother having turned to Catholicism, meaning to idolatry — and those sentences (his and in a lesser degree mine) rang as momentous to me then as erstwhile had rung those of the now discredited Tobias Durante, dead dad of my mom..."

"You mother's of wop extraction...?"

"No, I've told you, his dad sold handkerchiefs. He claimed he was an big-nose nez-percé nickel-footed native American whose totem, I mean taboo, or rather both, had been a snake."

"Hence you becoming a contortionist."

“Yeah, whatever. All of them claims..., what else but cheap superstition, just your crazy deceptive unsubstantiated pigswill, as I was telling... Ignorant idiots all. Anyway, the hostile skinny patriarch would get angry as a dwarf if only I’d mention dumb Tobias. He’d explode: tergiversating old geezer, filling the already rubbish dump of this world with a landslide of confusion, his mouth an zit-like volcano spewing all types of chickenshit nonsense, a tsunami of nonsense which is still ebbing over in your harping immature mind... And damn your mother also and all her spouting garbage.”

His dad, he continued, the half-caste crippled Chink, what an immense personality all told. He thought, he’s got to be right. Mighty character, wow, swears like a sailor of the old school, sneezes as a steamer, and what wild fanfares in his videos: Inaugurations, vernissages, public squares, bridges, corporation shipheads, circus parades... Spawns of journalists drifting clueless through the staid archipelago of his always solid-rock presence, at the rears of the beasts, like a microbe fond of shit, stercoraceous, coprophilous, smelling the big excrementitious heaps...

The way he tells it, so much vain empty passion... “I’m awed, so awed I’ve come to believe him blindly, with my eyes closed — see his point to drowsiness — my eyelids are so heavy, gotta doze — and the dream is him, his canned images, his truth — each house’s but a pen, with only that drawback — that among us the female that both forages and farrows is somewhat ostracized... Choose! — she’s ordered — you’re either this or that! While among them, her own kind, she is thought to be a princess, kind of, respected, admired, if necessary served, high on the hierarchy by her merits only...”

“Are you talking now about the hog or the elephants...?”

“The cureloms, of course.”

As the elder reached for his belt, at last tiny Chuck got it. He asked his father: “Shouldn’t my mama maybe reconsider on the light of this, and try it again...? None of my business, of course.”

He tells Maximine now: “Anyhow, so hogs it was for a while. Hogs for those

two — my mom and her Injun dad — what, thirty years or so with the foolish fable all true, a parabola of sorts, working miracles in the blazed banes of their minds... Our lineage going back to the primate, primordial pigs. Same skin, you know...? Sucklings, shoats, runners, gilts, barrows, rigs (each two thirds of a barrow. Castrated whole, minus a forgotten ball in the elevator,) runts (each the Anthony, the last in the hierarchy,) boars and sows — ah, the swine — now, all of a sudden, thanks to my dad and his elephantine love, my real enemies.”

“Changing mascots on the run. Perjured fans changing teams; damn the freaking losers, come above onto the winning bandwagon.”

“Like a Mormon changing the blood of cureloms for the blood of some other bloke brought to justice and savagely knackered. Sacrifice has always been so hot, the it of all times.”

“All tacky effigies, all illusory colored cardboard marionettes dealt from on high by the balls-scratching bishops and generals and enterprise chiefs. A powwow of wallowing revulsives...”

Some of the inhibited, repressed, kept close to the chest, backed-up hate was easy to transfer — their snouts, what were those but foreshortened trunks, proboscises, and as labile, as versatile as the actual McCoys...? Their tushes, what but tusks less glamorous still? Their bulk and ears, what if not elephantoid all in all...? And weren't they as facile when it came to earning their lives as clowns, performers, comics, fall-guys and so on...? One liked acorns, the other one oaks — to one to root was his best betting asset, to the other one just to uproot, and leave it at that. Pro forma, by and large, no conflict nor dispute: a couple of biggies apparently operated after the bully Hun system — prey upon whatever you encounter, abandon behind only a burnt land, then hunker on while the earth puts forth, backtracking only if the rear looks easier and more luscious than the front.

“On the opposite side of the argument, there was this disturbing **long hog** epithet applied by cannibals to humans. And then the learned doctors agreed — and a geek of a pal I had at the time — assiduous denizen of the library — he was there to remind me of the similarities — ah, yes, his loved brotherly companions, herds of Middlesex Saddlebacks, Berk-, Hamp-, York-shires, Palouses, Durocs, Scientists' Piglets, Spotted and Plain Poland

Chinas, Landraces, Swastika Pigs — more than four hundred breeds, I was ceremoniously told, roaming among the upright, and up-ended, and three-legged, and Hercules-tired-lying-by-the-side-of-the-path ziggurats — same skin, teeth, tongue, assumedly taste, our common omnivorousness, hair pattern, more interestingly still, for sure: their cardiovascular build-up, their digestive layout, invaluable for medical advancements, and sexual customs, kinky apparatuses (the boar's are much longer though never larger,) proven intelligence, the cleverer porker peoples well above the sillier one third of degenerating humanity... — in a word, all but a corresponding physiology and metabolism between them and we, uncanny, what, them, us...? Really, I trod in trouble, weren't I becoming a despicable, laughable misanthrope...? Slandering mankind by the intercession of the pig...? In the ultimate analysis, insulting myself...? Or were I...?"

"I boy taking the side of his mom and not of his dad. Sure sign of perversity, you freaking faggot, any psychologist would have sworn so."

"Except that thank god we were too poor for shrinks and damned fairy quacks of that caliber."

He next explains that on the base, bottom-side of the argument, still, maybe it were him, his dad, the misanthrope. His earnings (scant as they were) went all into his circus herds, he took a pleasure to tend them for free...

"His expenses hinged on the beasts' welfare, and period, that's it. Nothing left for the starving, the handicapped, the diseased, the crazy, the orphans, the attacked, his neighbors, my mother or me. At a pinch, had he a dime to spare, it was channeled in its integrity for the preservation of wild monsters..."

Nothing for the boars, he lists, dreamily listing in his tilted wheelchair, looking at the naked and well-dressed branches of the graveyard trees...

"Nothing for the wart-, forest-, red river-hogs, babirusas, peccaries — babirusas...? Dad's dreams of a new wife shooting wild beasts in Africa wasn't at least backfiring at us, at our backs around the sphere... They'd never shoot an elephant instead. No Orwellian spoken here. Damned

dickheads, my dad (childish creep) and her new imaginary bride shooting wild boars in the Serengeti... The new woman in his life... But acquired how, damned rat-poor lazy bastard. But she so elephantine instead of sow-like — but again, where really the difference...? A fat woman resembling another as almost not two other species whatever... A chimpanzee and certain preachers and politicians, perhaps..., yeah, pretty close, but no cigar.”

He next with his geeky pal researching everywhere, all the encyclopedias, for reasons — or only one whatsoever! — to get mad at the pigs. What a waste of years, the best in their learning youths...

“In private I tried, did I! Wanted so much to make the maniacal old man happy. Envisaged wide vistas, yes, tried instead so much to love the elephants. Plenty of room to roam... Africa... Plains, prairies at the core of the dark continent... Their concealed cemeteries, just a legend, full of pap... What about their touching mourning for the bones of the passed... That’s a passably good one. Or are they smelling the putrescence, and putrescence triggers sorrow in their stupid diminutive brains...? No, but skip it. Something worthy, think hard, or at least schmaltzy, sappy enough about them to expand on..., there’s got to be something to hang your rigid explorer’s hat on, no doubt... Let’s concentrate on the pluses, if any... Nothing doing, the in-built horror, transmogrified into hatred, unexplainable, a strange linkage, a beast in musth, destroying pews, stands, bodies... A sacred avenger, a damned apocalyptic thingus, monstrous, from almost pea-sized from the height of the last upper rows, the heavens, the choir stand where we scruffy angels intone our grateful ohs and ahs, to dimensions untold, approaching, enraged, cacodemonic, a fright to behold, unforgettable, a fury to be shot repeatedly, thousands of bullets wasted, and still the juggernaut charging, goring, demolishing... The angels scrambling, tumbling away, flying down. I’m paralyzed, asking for grace, praying to the welkins, the Olympus, gods above, deliver us from the fiend, the evil one, his acute wickedness, the malignity of the malicious misfeasor, the beast of hell incarnate, the fucking elephant, a mutiny indeed in my scrawny neurons, never to disengage the coupling, elephants and terror insuperable.”

His hand rigid as the hat of the explorer on the handles of his wheelchair, he’s still a little boy exposed to the gathering storm, delivered alone to the fury of the ultimate beast, climbing to get him, a hurricane bearing in, supremely vicious to boot... Dying, collapsing, the beast, just a few

crumbling rows before he gets at him. Him falling himself, the whole tent going down... And then nothing betters this, pure of heart him. Yes. Enters the glorious CIA, his dream come true, a heroic uniformed secret captain... He adopts him. At last the really real family complete...! Already his dad one of the bosses at Langley, Va. — the Campus, so called — and he his minion, his fag, his what, his squire... Dad, new dad, the CIA captains have the atomic bomb, the neutron and the neutering bomb, do they not...? We do indeed, my son. We do, you and I. And they (father and son) they'd open the heavy wrought iron door to the general office and his captain dad here he is, magnificent, an heavenly image, pointing him to the top brass, the department of state secretaries, the fancy cut-outs and the rabble technicians, the lot of them idly picking their noses, squishing their nits and crabs around the coffee-fountains: "That strapping young handsome boy, gentlemen, is my fully recognized son, of whom we all expect so much and great, deservedly I might add, for now that everything's been miscarried and exposed to public ridicule — utopias, arcadias, communes, satin-lands, peoples under gods — only the very few really knowledgeable about the ways of the different cattle-masses and flocks shall be able at all to offer a salutary glimpse on the appropriate ways for the straight managing of that sociological bipedal group we've formed worldwide... On this respect, I'll argue — viciously if need be, as another howling leviathan at large, smashing and sweeping as it ought to, with his well waxed leather-skin, which so perfectly lends itself to the juggernautish task, leveling then the few remaining architectonic healings of our impressively gaping history — that our strained will will will it, and if we will it forcefully enough, our breed that bred somebody as him will — and when I speak 'will' I most emphatically mean 'will' — will save us — the H.H. (Head of the Herd) R.M. Panurge the Eighteenth, our L.L. (another honorary title: Leader of the Lemmings. While R.M. stands for Robin Mutton, naturally,) our president, he's always asking for my secret counsel, of course, and I, impeccable servant, what do I do — every night I'm bathing my feet in lukewarm lotions, I've convoked my fully recognized one, and why not, I might ask, frowning even, if obligated to, why not indeed, when even chairs I've seen recognized in some old hearings, sort of, shown on TV, and anyhow, in that pleasant environment, what's my normal common behavior...? I'm consulting at the same time with my more private counsel — in him I trust — him, my full son no less — good, now I'm folding, almost done, come on, people, obediently, good soldiers, stark, stoical — mildly applaud, like this, I like that, thank you all..."

But then he awoke... None of his bones had broken, he still could be the hero under the spotlights... Willy-nilly, by any means necessary, yes, sir.

His imaginary father much more a model to follow than the surviving slob at his side. The slob who had flown the faster, leaving behind his petrified little son.

But dreaming, what a waste of time indeed, especially in the light of that terrifying plight he found then himself in. Remember...? That was the morning he had gone out not for a leisurely walk..., trying to recompose his badly mangle body, but to train obsessively from this day on to be the best contortionist ever, the best escapist, he's already escaped the beast once. The second time he'll not be so lucky. Maiming and death must follow. In the meantime preparation is harshly needed.

"I was widely breathing in and out, and kindly exercising my thirsty eyes around Roundhay Park, when behold, damn it, I tripped on the tip of a big stone which happened to have on its nose, yep, the careless image of a carved elephant, my nemesis, I knew!"

"How interesting," Maximine said, bored to tears.

But Coralline was done at last with her still more boring, and garbled and gnarled speech... She was coming fast to meet her, furious, another bloody-minded pachyderm, with stiletto heels at her shapely feet no less, balancing herself on the turf, her ass bobbing so preciously ...

Maximine intercepted her frantic trajectory. "Calm yourself," she mollified.

"You treacherous bad-faithed salope..." Coralline existentially called.

"Hear me out, I'm no salope, in any case you are salopier, and sloppier, than me, for hiding the truth..."

"You've been listening to him for the whole freaking half hour I had to parrot away the disgraceful eulogy..."

"I was only pretending to listen, most of the time. I did it as a spell of charity towards a poor disgruntled cripple. He went on and on about a pig

and an elephant story, such cockamamie bullshit, worse than the cock and the bull of legendary fame... Anyway, you should be glad that I paid him any attention at all — get a hold of yourself, I've learned that he's hired a private investigator...!"

"Damn!"

"Well, let's hope he's at least eminently fuckable, for one way or another we'll have to fuck him."

"Sister, you said it." They embraced while from afar the gimlet eyes of the hamstrung, discombobulated, out of order Chink bored burnings on the fashionable but sternly colored and modestly cut dresses of the two dear conniving friends.

10.

As Nina was jogging in Central Park, from one rotten tree a man fell in front of her. A rotten tree alright, not only a rotten branch, for the entire tree, riven and rent by an inner canker, now splintered with a long protracted crack of a noise, noise of a crack, then listed at two opposite sides at once, and lurched, and finally, dustily, collapsed. Nina was terribly frightened. First she thought a tiger was jumping in front of her, a hungry and confused escapee from the circus no doubt, or a boar, their grinded, shiny, soon bleeding fangs and tusks to the fore; then that the trees themselves had developed legs, tiny like the legs of termites that had wrecked them and emptied them of their wooden souls and now the carcasses of them were walking to the subterranean chambers of that other secret infernal nest of theirs...

The man was whimpering on the floor. He had a hat on his head, a trench coat around him, a leg broken, an ankle sprained, something, a lot, about him all wrong.

—Sorry, lass, he said, my cleats slipping, you know. Say, I seem to have come a cropper, and my beast of burden too.

—Could I be of any help, you want me to call a cop, or an ambulance...?

—No; I'll be fine. Plenty plunges like that, line of the work one does, you see.

—What do you do...?

—Well, just making friends on the run. Running up mountains. Calling people to beware here and there the sticks of unexploded dynamites... A prospector. I'm a prospector, yeah, and I prospect.

—Good. Well, I'll be going, if you are alright.

—Damn, wait, no, ay! I'm hurting everywhere. Mama, whoa!

—What were you doing on top of the tree, by the way? Not prospecting for oil. Are you some kind of a spy...?

—No, I'm a Norwegian.

—So am I!

—I know... I mean, it figures, you with your beauteous, vickings figure. Sorry I can't touch, though the temptation's invincible... My hands are all greasy. Before I climbed the tree I had to change a battery... Let me find a fountain that I wash my hands and you'll see what a faun I'm not.

—Indeed you aren't. What a clumsy beast. And now broken all over. You are not all there, are you...?

—Norwegians seldom are.

—True, but your hair is as black as the brilliant plumage of a Norwegian raven... A raven, not a man. Aren't you Oriental or something...?

—A little bit Chinese, an octoroon, worse...

—A half-caste gook...

—Worse, much worse... But Norwegian nonetheless.

—I see. Name a Norse-American of note.

—Ah... Millions upon millions, of course. There is this guy kidnapped baby Lindbergh, wouldn't he be Nordsky...?

—Baby what? Was that that movie star from the twenties.

—That's it, you see, you've also heard of him.

—You should do better than this.

—Surely no end of Minnesotans... Yeah, what about those Minnies... The Gophers, the Lutherans... Plenty of famous teams. And Willie the Olsen Olson and his orchestra... Knut the Brute with the Tough Glute, a celebrated circus strongman... And this writer, Garrison Lewis, his cosmic comical vision, in whose pages such, so much comical sorrowful animality chronically intervenes, like a pain in the, you know...

—Never heard.

—Your loss. You must. Corpuscles of wisdom.

—Ok. Name their racial, I mean nicely insulting epithet...

—We must be so blameless we hardly have one... I know bohunk can't apply to us... My cousin, eh... Knut. No, I've said that one already. My cousin Olaf... called me often a squarehead. And wait, I've learned it... Balderdash, Balder! The name of god in Norse. So...?

—I'm practically convinced. Though you really look pitifully inadequate.

—I know; lacking the fabled long head, the strongly marked brows and light eyes of the men of the North. Damned dipsomaniacs... Drunks, I mean. Their unutterable small-mindedness... Straitlaced creeps prone to microbes...

—Hey!

—I can say what I want against Norwegians if I'm one of them. And shit, do I know them... Loathsome cowards, the motive of their vaunted courage being what but the fear of losing their repute for valor...!

—Huh?

—Lachrymose bastards, crying in their cups, always melancholy, all faggots.

—True, all those blue eyes, that blond vacancy of stare, that far-away look, that suicidal urge...

—It must be all this raw fish.

—Why?

—I don't know.

—You must be right.

—Plus imagine all this ice... The gloomy background of the stern Norwegian landscape... The horror of it all. Ninety-four million miles away from the warmth...

—Ninety million!

—Distance to the irrelevant, unattainable, pertinent trumpeting of the shine of the Sun.

—Is that Ibsen?

—Who? Yeah, why not? Look can you drag my carcass up behind that shrubbery...? Not that I'm in a state to be able to take advantage of me, I mean of you, rather the opposite, but I really hate all those empty stares of the parodic artists, all those fools running afoul of esthetics. Masters of mimicry. Everybody homodromous, damned Norwegian lemmings... Don't you hate joggers...?

—Well, I'm one.

—Yeah, but the pretty one, the sole exception to the rule. Shit, it hurts...! Thanks. Wretched creeps, lonely, rude, selfish, faggoty, spiggotty...

—The Norwegians?

—The joggers. The others too. All that over-boring worthless queer activity. Dull routines galore, skiing, sliding, skating, duck-hunting...

—I love to hunt ducks! Every time I visit I try to joint the party.

—Yeah, well, but you, is different. A pretty woman like this... Such a well-turned torso, such long and sculptural legs, such..., such... Ah, it hurts, it hurts...!

—I'll fetch somebody, you need help...

—No, wait. I hate ambulances. There's two sets of sinners, one set are the homosexual sodomites, the other the baleful ambulance demons... Set on reciprocal mimicry also.

—Really!

—Yeah, did you ever hear their clunky language...? All those gutturals... Hello, a grunt; thanks, another grunt; bye, a third grunt. Grunt, grunt, grunt... And come on, pass the hooch, we are not inebriated enough, you know.

—Are these the Negroes in the ambulances...? Or you happen to mean the Norwegians, for I must warn you I find the language a delight.

—You do? Ok, so do I. Except that from a distance. Solar. In the family circle, only my long dead grandmother knew a word or two of the jarring lingo. She talked much better Chinese.

—You gave me one of those starts when you fell from the tree — and then the tree after... Then I thought you might be one of those rabid squirrels one hears about, spreading panic all over the city... You look it too.

—Thanks, a cute rabid squirrel. But aren't squirrels lithe...?

—Plenty, and scurrilous, and scurrying...

—You got it. In my line of work...

—By the way, what do you really do?

—I'm doing fine. A bit shattered, a few pieces badly fragmented, I guess.

—And as a job...?

—Prospecting, shit, I told you already, you are a cagey little vixen, aren't you. Climbing trees up and down to peer deep into the horizon. And also down there, in the wet, on the Wagnerian landscapes, seascapes, the trees and ruins of the deep sea.

—Deep sea, eh...? How romantic.

—How Norwegian.

—You popped from the tree like a cork from a bottle of champagne. It was so fucking hilarious.

—It must have been, you are still laughing.

—The sight! But then I thought about my uncle. Same shock. You fallen from the sky like a fucking tornado-driven frog, and my uncle Joe appearing from the dead.

—Ghosts of the drowned, your typical Norwegian sea specters... I've read about those...

—No; I went home last Summer. It was three years I was not visiting the family. We were all there, packed, you know the racket, raw fish for all, a few of the autistic cousins screaming for more food. All a sudden my uncle Joseph. An apparition! I must have fallen on my haunches. Figuratively. He dapper as ever. Shiny of skin, well combed. And I thought him dead for three years...! Couldn't believe it! Almost died myself, jolted out of my skin, the immense astonishment...! I said, uncle Joe, I must speak with you in private. We went to my father's den...

—Damn igloo!

—No, it was Summer. We went to my dad's den. There were plenty of spread maps all over. On the walls, on the table... We were both embarrassed. My uncle. Me. Faking to consult the maps, the seas, the cities, the inventions... I said, sorry, now I understand why Helena didn't answer any of my letters of deep-felt condolence. Helena's my aunt. I said, of course, you aren't dead. My mother had told me on the phone. You know, she said, uncle Joseph's dead. Prostate cancer. And I cried my eyes out. But now I'm thinking, it must have been a confusion of uncles, the dead fellow her uncle Joseph, not you, my uncle Joe — and looking like a million crowns too. He was forgiving. He caressed me. He said, you are the very image of unsdkyldighed, of unguiltiness. I said, you are so kind. He said, yes, but I still have an inoperable lump in my brain. Prostate cancer too, spread. Malignant islets metastasizing on the old map. I was desolated. Shit, shit, and re-shit, I said, I'm never coming back to this fucking dying country. It is tainted with death. But he said, in all countries people get ill, falter and die. Eaten away, like standing trees. But, uncle, such an elegant and well-groomed and debonair guy as you? Is not right...! But then I'll be awed for keeps... I'll be grateful to him forever. He took me in his arms, as though I were again a little girl. He told me, how happy he'd been, the extreme bliss as a tyke of a few (years,) curling like a tiny angel into the folds of her plump naked grandmother... He was so looking forward to meeting her again... The love of his life... With me, and aunt Helena, and my cousin Josephine...

—How touching...

—Norwegian Gypsies trace with their whips a mark on the snow. It resembles a testicle with a smile on it — happy face avant-la-lettre. We are happy people behind all those layers of melancholic gunk — of darkness and raw fish.

—These Norwegian Gypsies, such a pain in the ass. Though don't get me wrong, I delight in Norse-stories; they are far grander than the Greek one. Damned queers. There is the story of Dalmau, a Norwegian captain... He was forced by a tempest to anchor his vessel in a sheltered fjord... At a bombard's throw of his peaceful home, where Adelaide, the maiden who kept the bridge, his only daughter, awaited, whiling away the while while petting her pet bull... Big, powerful, hewn on Norwegian hills, our totem, our ancestor's, Norwegian born indeed... With big testicles and such..., long wherewithal, capiche...? Staying behind too, keeping the home fires roaring, and the daughter happy... With the other idle ships rotting in the

bay. And the dad doomed... He can't ever reach her. He's sworn an impious oath... He's punished to go round and round the bloody seas non-stop... Listen, I can't shoot the breeze any longer, I'm losing it...

—What can I do...? You need a doctor.

—Seeing that we are compatriots, and that we can trust each other, and I'm really terrified with those ambulance niggers..., couldn't you help me up to your apartment, seeing that it is so near, I mean, it must be, and just applying a couple of splints tied with a bit of a sheet or a rag or a towel... And then once this is fixed, I'll phone my mother so that she can pick me up, and she doesn't die of the impression of seeing his boy mangled in such a nasty way... Capiche...? By the way, the name's Howard... Your's Nina, I presume...?

—Yeah, say, how did you know.

—Norwegian intuition, baby. And I've been discarding millions of women's names in my conscience... Nina suits you the best.

—Really...?

11.

Yep, soon as Coralline entered her apartment, she knew something was wrong... The pervading heavy stink of cheap perfume mixed to some exaggerated medical stuff, plus the stinging insult of rotten flesh, maybe as from the rest of a piece of carrion lackadaisically munched at by a giant skink or newt, she thought...

She had sexy visions of Nina being devoured by a King-Kongesque lizard who'd dragged himself up to an open window and... But, with practicality in mind, she tiptoed to the kitchen, she went directly to the cookie jar, reached under the ginger snaps, she found the stashed gun... She slunk now very carefully down the main corridor... She heard noises in her room...

Couldn't have been the family parrot, for they had none. The keen reek of drugs became more overpowering. She peered through a crack past the door.

A man, or rather a rickety puppet, in stained rags and tatters, was rummaging, between the predella and the prie-dieu, down into the drawers of her treasure-box, sorting and sniffing up drawers and knickers, and reading into diaries and other private papers therein stowed...

"Croak!" She said, and the other almost did. He fell in a knot of bandages, agitating like a big stupid lug of a wounded fish caught in a self-woven net. "Hey, put 'em up, I said, buster!" She shouted, irrupting now into the sullied sanctum.

"Don't shoot, I'm unsdkyldig!"

"You are what...?"

"Ah, sorry, I thought you were my fellow Norwegian."

"You are as Norwegian as I'm a bird-brained cricket, a cricket-brained parrot."

"What?"

"What yourself. The fuck you doing here...? Time's a-wasting, start letting the dope out, start telling, yeah. Let's see... You have half a minute to answer..., and concoct it good; I'm making my mind to shoot, damned rapist prowler."

“Lady, some compassion. I’m in excruciating pain. I was looking for some pain-killers, marshmallows steeped in heroin, something like that, you bet.”

“Where’s the girl?”

“Have a got the faintest...? Actually I know perfectly. She just stepped out to buy some anesthetics. We are compatriots, you see, virtual family.”

“Cut the Norwegian crap.”

“That’d be most arduous, we are nothing but crap.”

He was right, at least with respect to himself.

Only dressed in remedial dressings, namely with badly tied together rags, imbued with iodine, Howard, already misbegotten by ruthless nature, looked like a wounded dying octopus... Fragile, he flailed, and his dirty ragged tentacles, like broken arrows sticking helter-skelter from the drenched melting quiver of his body, helplessly flounced. Coralline laughed, but in infinitesimal brevity, her crystalline guffaw had the sharp edges of cutting glass.

“My heart!” Howard faked, as cut.

“Quit the phony shit, I said! Who are you? And why the fuck are you here...? My patience runneth over, you filthy Chink. The stink of you, as of a half rotten dog, is so pungent that, amid the faded spices used together with the soiled wraps used to wrap you, Egyptian mummy style, it still clings...”

“It clings, it chinks, it rings, it clinks, clinks, clinks, like the little bells in the clicketty slide...”

“You are dead!”

“Oh well, hey, sister, wait. And what will my cousin Nina say when she comes back...?”

“Nina?”

“I sang to her another of those touchy Norwegian songs, Give Me Shelter, it’s called. Give me shelter, yeah, yeah, yeah... An old traditional song from the sixties? And her heart opened like the soft wet rose of her pink blonde’s cunt... The bitch has a heart, don’t be a bitch with no heart...”

“Is that another Norwegian song?”

“I was leisurely taking my midday stroll up the alleys of the park, when suddenly, the awful heart-stopping shock, for I was overturned by Nina’s horse.”

“Which horse?”

“Well, herself. She runs like one.”

“How true.”

“And running hard as she does, I had no time to spare myself easing to the side; she ran me over, alas... She said, a change of venue is recommended, come... She haltingly brought me here, she got all the pieces of my broken body more or less together and she heaved, and pulled and pushed, she...”

“You are as sick as I... Actually much less, for I’m sick and nauseous of your stink and sight.”

“Well, is like this, to preempt the untoward smells, we...”

“All faked, just a ruse to enter the apartment and rape my privacy.”

“Well, give me a break, I must have broken something, the crash was heart-rending, the fall astounding, so hard and fabulous, and well-staged. Like a stagecoach of old pounding you at full speed. The woman weighs a ton more than me, for Pete’s sake. I’m just a pleasingly petite fellow, well-rounded but smallish...?”

“Enough of that!”

“She took me in. She said, boy, have I got for you some nice absorbent cotton and bandages and iodine! She lay me on the sofa...”

“Laid me...”

“What?”

“Laid me on the sofa...”

“Did she...? I was warned you were a bit... I mean, nothing. So now there I was. Mottled, perplexed, sprawled, no longer a prowler of the parks, but a prim prima donna being massaged, flailing about in abandonment, at the mercy of that angel of mercy, my shoulder blades stabbed and stabbed my her arrows of love... As the hours drew on, the shit-colored iodine (not a help for sunburn, I hear,) suffused my taint, I quit looking a like dirty bruised yellow dog, I looked more like a nigger now, or somebody with a ruptured spleen, a malady which neither iron, iodine, nor yet sulphur, can cure. Ah, the spleen, the suicidal melancholy of us Nordskys, well I remember when...”

“Shut up, so you were painted with iodine.”

“True confessions! I like you style, I love the discipline, now I’m cooking... So... She’d found some phials of iodine, my angel of mercy, stashed on the kitchen, near the cookie jar...”

“What?”

“She painted the stinging cuts and bruises and dolorous sprains with a kitchen cake brush... She is a dear, she’s a doe, she’s a warm-hearted reindeer, a moose most moist, she was itemizing the salves and so on... A drachma of tincture of wisdom, a drachma of tincture of myrrh, a drachma of tincture of green... Something missing, she couldn’t find the cask wherein the secret orchel concoction, a panacea, is kept... Should I help her rummage...? The soul receives a tincture from the body, thus... I won’t injure truth and say, I hold no taint or tincture, for I wear plenty of iodine, at least, but to avoid any tincture of scandal, without the least tincture of imprudence, still I’ll admits of no tincture of shame, of no tincture of cunt salt and brackishness, for she never allowed me to go higher and deeper than her upper thighs when she was wrapping me in spare rags made of spent sheets — many people died in those — now I’ll die myself a happy well-spent life, yes, shoot, shoot, and thanks, thanks, let the rags of many other specters from my blood a deeper tincture gain...”

“Quit the tricks.”

“...untiring, she went on, tincture of benzoin, a little tincture of bashfulness, tincture of syrup, of lotion, not for the ocean to wash away all the tincture she lubricates me with. There’s achiote enough to give it a reddish hue to the whole, I must be looking quite presentable, now dissolved with a bit of magnesium, in absolutely pure ether, under the catalytic influence of the iodine... I might come undone... Look, I’m already unspooling, spoiled and unspooling... Ah, a last memory, so sweet, before you shoot me, yeah, the vaunted legendary resourcefulness of the Chinks (and specially the Chinkessess,) my mom, she always made her own iodine out of strong tea and baking soda... But shoot, I’m ready. Don’t have a doubt any more... The soul is both round and oblong... Halleluia! Only... I wanted to say good-bye to those close goddesses of femininity and feminism... My mom, my sister Adelaide, my cousin Nina... I’ve fortunate enough... But, alas, I’m left wanting, now the longing the rent fabric of my winched soul...”

“Is it really winched...?”

“Winched it is.”

“Well, perhaps... We could arrive at an understanding of sorts, let’s sit down... What happened then? I still don’t know what you’ve done with my girl.”

“Meaning no harm (of course!) I fell asleep... All those ministrations, plus the trauma of the appalling collision... She said ah! She’s just stolen away, on tiptoes what’s more... She came like a squirrely little dainty thing from the Nordic woods, she told me (softly to my ear, in case in my coma-like oblivious slumber I could hear a few suggestive hints, so that if awoken I knew I wasn’t forsaken... (Ah, she’s such a one for romantic songs...!) What she told, she told me she had to go a moment to the shop to get some additive or other for she needed to fix supper and she’d squandered all the goodies on my wounds... I don’t know what else. She just left... As soon as she did, I felt better. Strangely. And I started getting busy, I mean, bored, I started getting bored, needed some entertainment, went to the bedroom of the lord of the house, searching for some nudes’ magazines...? Next thing I know, still dreaming of her smooth supple hands over me, I’m wakened up by something else, it could kill me, the dead-cold barrel of your gun up my sphincter — that’s a whole day of untoward adventures already for a private dickhead, a private person, a nobody innocently strolling and bang..., listen, my story holds water, thoroughly, you otta cut me some slack...”

“If that’s true, she ought to be back soon... We’ll wait for her story... In the mean time..., no funny moves...”

“Ma’am, with my wounds...!”

Silence fell like a graying pall... Through the locked window the evening entered in agonizing jolts... of agony. The clock, the clock... The clanks of cars, buses, trams... Nobody is waiting for me. I put on hock my sleazy ivory watch with one of ’em shine boys. He gave me enough coins just that I might board the subway and the bus to the empty abode... Paltry scapegrace of a ninny chick pickaninny roaming the dismal streets of the unforgiving city, knows zilch from wrong or right... Talk about devotion, imagine, me the real host in the flesh...? Laughable alternative, your honor, I agree, but it’s truuueeee... What? That where was I going with that garbage...? I sighed, I need a lawyer... Shut up, Howard, if not the little stinking depressing doggie of your drenched soul you are smelling anymore, now you smell money. Let old grudges die... Salute those green

hills... From whence the fat bankrolls beckon...

—Why the silence...?

—What! I'm calculating...

“The bribes? I'm not bribing you, fuck you.”

“Alas, you misconstrue... I calculate my fast shrinking chances under the stern supervision of your gun's all-seeing eye... A brownie, I mean a Browning no less... A crippled poor Chink like me, just home, almost dead from a terrible fall..., you otta be less cruel, I'm in agonizing pain, you know...? Put the gun away.”

“You'll jump up like a yellow cat.”

“Yellow, always yellow, oh, god, where I'm going with that ordure always stuck to my skin...? Me, a frank open jolly Norwegian guy to top it all...”

“Cut the fucking Norwegian spiel, you are just another shitty Chink...”

“Another...?”

“Yeah, you are also a Chinese, what?”

“You said also...”

“So?”

“I just was singing... You said also... Isn't a nice song...? She's a sap for sappy song and stories... Nina.”

“Well now, is she...?”

“You aren’t, I take it.”

“You’ll take something else — lead in your yellow belly — unless you sing soon a better song than a shitty bohunk sucker ditty...”

“Sister, you are a tougher cookie than I’m used to, I give up, such priggishness you hardly find about any longer. You would need to have yourself flown to last century or to the arrears of that... I’m game. Tell me, what you wanna know...?”

“The arrears...?”

“The what...?”

“I was questioning your poor choice of words...”

“Well, so shoot me. Is our fault if we Nordskys are a bit clumsy as to what pertains to pedantry...?”

“How much does he pay you...?”

“So you admit you know the anonymous person that hired me, meaning Chuck the Chink, Circus Contortionist, such a blissful sight for eyes of all ages...?”

“Come on, the poor dear boy, he was a great friend of the family. Since his accident with the elephant in heat, he’s developed some bizarre psychic troubles. He doesn’t accept his plight, he sees ploys and conjurations everywhere. He doesn’t come to visit any often now either, I mean, he doesn’t come at all.”

“Well, it wasn’t his dick that was crushed.”

“That’s what I mean. And he’s not coming. Psychotic!”

“Unless you meant his private dick, the one who really got crushed and demolished, by your horse...”

—My horse...

—Truly. Anyway I know it was you who paid the thug...

—You know exactly shit, I can shoot you now, you know, I’ve got a gun, you are dangerous burglar prowling in my bedroom, where’s your license, by the way...?

—We Chinks go for free, as you’ve noticed. We don’t attend to the gobbledygook of the control freaks, fucking Westerners, repressive, repressed, constipated turds that they are... I repeat, the finesse of we Chinks... Femininity and feminism are real things... Listen, we can cut a deal... I was telling my fellow Norse I hate Chinks, all fags...

—Which Norse, which Chink?

—Exactly. Let’s choose a patsy, a fall guy, let’s tell the Chink he’s the guy who wanted to kill him, now the Chink kills the killer, the wrong killer, or even the right one, does it matter? All those motorcyclist punks need to die, anyway; anyhow, now the crippled Chink goes to prison or, with a bit of luck, to the chair...

“Which chair, the dentist’s?”

“That reminds me. I might sue you. As the employer of the klutzy misfeasor (misfeasorette?) who ran me over and knocked a few of my choppers off, I’m entitled to a hefty compensation...”

“Shut the fuck...”

“Oh, wield the pistol, please, tough cookie you. Knock me off a few more teeth, please. I’ll get rewarded a higher fee still. By the bulwarks of justice against the stream of dwarfy nobodies whose numbers threaten to overwhelm us, patriotic citizens. By the way, here are your bullets. Looking for the tinctures, trying to help the dumb bohunk, I found your toy and dismantled it a little bit...”

“You sleaze.”

—You thought I would’ve been so cool with a real bullet aiming to make me a new yellow navel or two...? I would’ve had incidences of digestive tract untold.

—That so...? Anyway, I wouldn’t have shot, you know that.

—Because you are guilty as hell.

—Of what?

—Of hiring the murderous scumbag almost did poor Chuck in.

—Is that what Chuck thinks, that I hired somebody... God, how awful!

—He just wants the name of a punk. Give a name. Any name. It just has to look a credible target. A punk with a motoring jacket and fascistic tattoos, so patriotic, so American, so clean in a dirty, filthy, puking way...

—I’ll give you one. Willie the jackal, I’ll tell you the stinky joint he hang around in. He’s a stinker. I have nothing to do with him. Except that once he harassed me and a lady friend of mine. He’s asking for a slight corrective... Except again, that I think he’s partly a cop... An undercover...?

—I’m writing all that down.

—But I told you nothing.

—A couple grand will erase all my memories of today. Sweet though they'll be. Even the impossible miracle. That I ever became a bohunk Nordsky. With my refined exquisity build... The girl's a damned witling alright.

Here she rang, Nina, her voice, fresh from the cold. "Supper will be ready in a jiffy. I had to run to Jimmy's."

"Will you stay for supper?"

"I most certainly will not. Gotta run. The subway, then the bus, till I'm home, to my many-numbered family, all famished, desperately asking for food. Aren't we all like this...? Breeding with a vengeance."

He had dressed in a rush. He had pocketed his moneys. He was agile as an albino rabbit. He disappeared in a whisk. Only his stink and his bandages were left.

Coralline was fixing to give silly Nina the reprimand of her life. Then she said nothing. Maybe she had said enough for that day. She would take her supper. She would listen to the lame tale of the soubrette-attired broad. She would just tut-tut her a little bit, would maternally admonish...

We've got to be more careful to let anybody in, plenty of criminals loose, and against such a desirable beauty as her, sex predators, murderers, preachers, cops, Mormons, what-have-you... Claustrophobic, she feels. Sharing her chambers with a Pleiades of such undesirables... The shivering viruses going surreptitiously about, doing silently their sinister dastardly deeds... First she's just going to call a house cleaning firm, the toughest in the nation, the shall be here first thing in the morning, they are thorough, they stand behind their men with a rearing smoking battery of annihilating contraptions, an army of disinfectors, the brave, the bright, the executioners, all uniformed, ready to sterilize the deepest buried cranny where the nests of the tiny avengers lurk, let alone the more brazen critters carelessly a-swim over the rugs...

Then she would pick a book by somebody really heavy, for she needs a heavy dose of heavy useless thinking, Hegel, Kant, Meinong... Oh, and she has to write a few e-mails... Then she'd be all set for bed. Where she would curl with the blonde. And then she would sleep the well-deserved sleep of the just...

12.

Maximine had been summoned by phone to Chuck's little Rambler uptown.

Driving upstate, curiosity gnawing at her, Maximine was holding the steering wheel with such trepidation that she had rammed her Jaguar into the cantilevered beam of an overloaded truck. The beam had a little red flag dangling at its end; the beam missing Maximine's head by a fraction of an inch, she still had the wherewithal to get hold of the red rag and with it protecting her snakeskin glove get rid on the go of the shards of windshield restructuring most annoyingly her view of the perilous road. She'd arrived frozen at Chuck's door. From Chuck's she'd phoned for a garage attendant to come fetch the car, repair it and bring it back. She counted on the chat with Chuck to last long enough so that everything jived at the end. She saying good-bye to Chuck and the Jaguar with its new windshield waiting at the door.

She couldn't get to Chuck's faster than she discombobulatedly did. Had he discovered Coralline's plot...? Knew he now the whereabouts of the would-be murderer...? Still more thrilling to think about — ah, the shivers of delight... Had the would-be murderer been murdered himself? Had he, Chuck the cripple, done the deed, gotten rid in his accustomed elegance of such pesky interloper? Very understandably, she was on tenterhooks.

"So tell me, what happened...?" First thing she said.

Seeing also such bad weather, Chuck, in anticipation of her hurried arrival,

had been brewing some tea. Now he'd heightened the value of the cipher on the thermostat, he'd rummaged in his room and he'd come back with some woolen trousers and a two felt shirts and a robe so that Maximine could drop off those wet frozen clothes and be comfortable. Maximine was doing just that, peeling her tights and panties and next walking into the thick trousers...

Chuck was having a boner on his lap.

"Come on! I'm dying of acute nosiness-itis here!"

Chuck cleared his throat. "Well, it's like this... Howard, that's my private dick, a very sharp upright little fellow, had discovered where the prick who had fucked me lived, not lived, really, but hanged about in... A very disreputable queers' joint by the stevedores' docks. Nobody in his right mind would approach it, a den of sickness and crime."

"I get you."

"Last night, I had shed away all my impedimenta, all my materiel consisted of a new shooter, a point nine gauge, my mind was made, I had read a few absurd Buddhist riddles, it empties the brain of all notions and emotions, it makes you totally stupid, unthinking. The previous day I had had my wheels well greased. Then I phoned for a large wheelchair-accommodating taxi to pick me up. I told the driver, leave me at the docks... I'll tell you the precise spot. He was quaking in his carcass, shitty crap of a beefy bully of a hairy man... Now, indelible barkings of a few mangy dogs... The dismal echoes of their howlings... I had premonitions of death. Sweet feelings of having at last done it all. I was ready to turn the gun to my own light-headed, sparks-carrying, delivered head. The taxi driver was fidgeting about, shitting in his pants, he was praying to his arch-druid or whoever the fuck, he had the hiccups, wouldn't haggle at all. I gave him no tip; get lost, I said. The lost last rags of some recently unhanged fellow who had hanged himself from a light pole with no light rustled in the filth-smelling sea breeze... I entered the joint... It stank."

"You are right!"

“I sat on my chair, I demanded a whisky, hot. There I was, with my eyes peeled, with a gun ready to burst on my lap; I had entered with my mind made to kill him on sight... But he was nowhere to be seen... I waited for hours, so it seemed... People were coming back from the crapper, people would come in from the street... Never him. At last I risk it, I asked... Where’s the jackal...? Where’s Willie tonight...?”

“And...? God, the nerves are eating me alive, I’m all wet and sweaty!”

“The old man told me, you don’t know yet. He’s in the slammer. For killing a fellow cop.”

“For killing a fellow cop — that’s rich, that’s great!”

“My hearing’s pristine, I said, and yet I don’t seem to have heard you, I said. He was a killer-cop cop-killer, easy, you see so many of them lover’s tiff among those...”

“A lovers’ tiff! Magnificent!”

“I asked, did it happen to happen here...? The old gizzard, I mean geezer said, No they shared an apartment, it happened there... Willie tried to hang himself by all at once throwing himself through the window with a rope tied to the range — the rope unraveled, the gas poured out on, the jackal broke a leg when he fell...”

“Oh, how deliciously does it all jam together in the end! Perfect, I love it. Will he get the chair next...”

“The wheelchair? Are you thinking poetic justice...?”

“Silly, I mean the electric chair. What are you doing, fidgeting also down there, you still got the gun?”

“No.” And he joked, in a stiff way of talking, as if he’d learned the language

not from a Chinese, but from a monkey. “You wet, I stiff, Jane.”

“What...? Ah, poor Chuck, I didn’t know you still could...” She was so touched, she felt she had to be so caring now, Maximine. She opened Chuck’s fly. His little ratty fellow was at attention all right. “You need it so much, let me help you get a little..., maybe between the two of us we’ll manage to get you pebbles off...?”

Maximine went to rinse her mouth. Chuck wiped his lap with a napkin. When Maximine came back, she fixed herself a cognac.

“What I don’t understand,” Maximine recommenced, sitting down on an armchair, “is why would he have attacked you in the first place...? This you haven’t ascertained. Your little dick fellow didn’t get to the bottom of it.”

“No, he only discovered the guy. Not his motive. You are right. I still have my doubts... In fact, I was hoping maybe you could tell me something about it...”

“Me? What do I know?”

“As per our converse by the bogus lake at Chuckeline’s laying of the body...? I thought you gave handles to pin my hopes to. Like I was imagining... Where did the orders come...? Could they have come from Dick...? From Coralline...? From the both of them...?”

“Ha! Here you are being ludicrous, some manic imp of obsession is bilking you of your own powers of reasoning. If you think it might be a pissed ex-lover...! You must have jilted plenty others, Chuck...”

“But with the money to actually hire a punk...?”

“You are dreaming, you are out of your mind. As for the two of them in a tandem, a conjoined plot between the exes! They hate themselves more than ever. Don’t you know Dick’s remarrying...?”

“A do we know her? Is it the dumb Norwegian?”

“Never...! She’s a tie, I’m told.”

“She’s tight...? A tie, too tight...? A tie against whom, by how many points...? I... Or tied to whom...? A Siamese twin...? I knew the guy was a pervert, with money, and now more that his parents are off the charts, but...”

“Not Siamese; a Thai, from Thailand.”

“Narrow cunts, I’m told, sphincterous... Well, I’ll be...” His smashed legs didn’t impede Chuck to still wiggle his glutei either.

“You got that right, baby. She’s about four feet tall, I’m told. Of course, it figures, good grief.”

“I know, I know...” Both knew that Dick went for tight narrow spots. “A new Thai now, what do you know...? Coralline must be furious! I remember how furious she was already at Chuckeline laying of the earthly... How do you call it...?”

“What...?”

“The earthly used-up, exploited husk, casing, scabbard, what’s the word I’m looking for...? Snake..?”

“Snake, snake, snake...”

“The snakeskin he molts out off...”

“Ah, the shedding...? The cast-off, the exuviae...? *Tunicae serpentium exuviae*...”

“That’s it, the tunic the snake doesn’t want any longer, out of fashion, last year’s model, how do we call it? The despoil, the spoil, I got it, the molted earthly sheath...”

He still looked dubious.

“Pish!” said Maximine, “a fig for all those useless words. We need clear notions, not true? Few word, clear ideas. Is that not Buddhist also? Not a wide vocabulary to muddle still more the muddle muddy waters...”

The window showed the spectacle. The tempest roared on. Next to an obviously dead duck, there were visible traces of violence. Molting dead birds, how odd. Forcibly picked whores. The living cocks of fellows dead in a terrible collision, the nails growing, the beard too, the cocks throbbing, like the body of the beheaded duck, wanting emancipation, wanting a life of its own. The back of the other building, another rambler with another cripple inside maybe, pondering about the head of the head of the dead molting duck, what’s the dead head thinking, thinks the dead head on the cripple’s shoulders, or has his head been also cut off...?

There was a slight tremor of the earth, as if the elephant who supported it fidgeted with his fly. Maximine woke up from her reverie... There was some fruitage trodden underfoot. She got up, went to the kitchen to fetch a pail, a sponge. Through the kitchen’s window, looking at the side of next rambler, a forgotten coop, a few dispirited hens and some molting ducks were in there, half-melted, like wax in the heat, by the cold. The winter worm was raging. As the tropical crocodile in the slime of his sleep by the bank flattered himself as the master dauber of the flats, those poor songless birds were now spoils given over to the sneers and the gibes of the elements that flatten the beasts with less luck... One gets too much, his neighbor nothing... Until death doth us unite in the same fucking fate...

“Say, you know what!” She popped back, all enthusiasm.

“What!” Chuck was startled; the warmth, the storm, the little sex, the cognac, the lull, all had combined to make him pretty drowsy...

“Say, I was thinking... Maybe it was all an elephant thing!”

“An elephant thing...?” Uncomprehending.

“Your creepy leg-smasher? He had learned somehow about your psychotic pachydermal hatred... Ok? And say he privately, secretly belonged to a fanatical pachydermal sect — I bet you, there must be a few of those in the States... Crazies for every mania, collectors of molted skins, you name it, hauptneigen und kot lecken, diese Wissenschaften sind miteinander verschwistert...”

“What...?”

“Sorry, my readings... Trying to keep up with Coralline. These two sciences, nodding yes boss, and then shit-licking, often going so close together you could say they intermix...”

“Is that Marx? Are you becoming a pinky Commie?”

“With my money?”

“An extravagant specimen, a fanatical maniac of a special sect, pachydermatous or otherwise.”

“No, but no shit. Couldn’t it be...? They worship elephants, the witlings, the poor suckers that belong to this sect... Take somebody like your late dad...”

“Dad. Maybe you’ve got something there... He’d flame up if somebody’d say something anti-elephantine in his presence. He would threaten to crash the fucking taxi unless the client retracted... He’d get mad as hell, that’s a fact; that’s why I had such a frightening growing-up... Eager to get out of home the sooner the better.”

“Let’s say the cop-killer killer-cop, the killer-cop..., no, I’ve got it right the first time, let’s say he was also a circus buff, first passion in his pea-brained big head, second being his motorcycle...? Might have attended the Circensian functions, the Barnumian games, often enough, every chance he

got. And he might have noticed how you never appeared near any of your hated nemeses — the beasts and you always at opposite ends of the program — he's getting very suspicious after a while... He's a psychotic fathead, he only goes to the circus to see the elephants — your dad reborn, your dad all over, murderous little pea-sized brain and all..."

"Indeed, I see your angle; not crappy at all, the idea, not crappy..."

"Obsessive fuckers are known to figure out all kind of stupid schemes. He realizes that you keep in never, never getting near them, not even greeting together in the last gung-ho, never once with them; he's stupid, but here's his obsession; his obsession makes him sharp in this point only; he notices... Even in the event of a fire, *saive qui peut*, yet, elephants and you, always at the farthest ends one from the others... The gross objects of his adoration the most hated shapes for you imaginable. A rectal fear of them for you, a rectal fixation in him... This things happen all the time..."

"Indeed they do; all kind of queers to make up a world. I'll tell Howard to investigate this new standpoint when the guy's released... Or when he escapes...; he being a cop, so-called escaping is much easier."

"Yeah, but in his case he killed one of them also."

"So? Lovers' spat — they are all faggots, you know."

"Well, dear me, of course."

"It's maybe the tightness of the uniforms attracts them..."

"Oh say, talk about queers! Old foggy Bobby and me are celebrating our 25th anniversary. Will you be there...? Everybody'll be! And you are invited. I'll have somebody to pick you up, ok?"

Chuck beamed. He was grateful. Women were really a gift of..., let's see, let's say, Buddha...?

13.

The blizzard roared on. Maximine's phone rang in her purse. It was the garage people, regretting to say that due to the fact that they had lost the current they were unable to fix the Jaguar and return it as promised. She, good-naturedly enough, said, don't worry, tomorrow first thing in the morning. The drones at the other end of the flying photons were happy to agree.

"We'll have to tweak a few glitches, mon ami," she said to Chuck, "I'll have to spend the night here. No current, no car."

The Chink was only too happy. He insisted that he wouldn't have thought to allow her to risk such a risky trip back to her home anyhow. "In that storm. Are you kidding?"

Maximine excused herself. Went to the can with her phone. She rang home. The Polish maid Marietska answered. "Where's master Bobby?" Maximine wanted to know.

—Ma'am, he's upstairs, writing.

—Ok, listen. That freaking snow storm has done it. Almost did me in too. Doesn't matter. Listen... Now I'm caught by it — you get it, like in a game of tag? Am it...! What...? Skip it. Tell him I'm irretrievably detained chez my friends... We have no current either," she lied, "all we girls are thrown in together, playing cards by candlelight. We are giggling up a riot. Huh...? Skip that also. Tell him I'll be back tomorrow, I'll call again when I start the trip back, ok? This you understand...? Listen, you know dildo...? Dildo! Yeah..., yeah... One of those...", now she lowered her voice still more, "you'd be happy here, we have a Chink..., a Chinese, yes, he used to be a human dildo, yeah..., believe it or not, the whole of him in, head first, his pate..., his head all shaved, and lubricated...? Creamed...? Yeah, a human

dildo, I'm telling you... Isn't that quelque chose...? I know it sound incredible... But so do so many tales one hears and tells, no...? Huh...? No, he's not active anymore. Poor boy, listen, I'm no snitch... No tell-tale bitch... Me! That I don't like to gossip...! Anyway, you know me, Marietska... But, listen, he got his legs crushed by the foot of an elephant..., both of them, yes, sahib! The human dildo. Ain't it awful...? I'll tell you all when I come back. Now go glide to the commodore's sanctum, and... Go up to the den, and tell Bobby I won't be back tonight. Let him not to worry. Got it...? Ok, signing off. Adieu, adieu."

Chuck had been fixing some light supper. He'd opened some tins and cans, he'd washed a few tomatoes... With a frown of concentration, he was wrestling now with some long-handle pincers trying to reach an upper shelf and rescue a bag of nuts...

"I was talking to the maid."

"Is she one of those cute packages?"

"Do you Buddhists think of something else aside from the bagatelle?"

"We Buddhists are dirtier than I could ever intimate..."

"Dirtier as in the ca-ca-making sense, or rather in the highly sexed piggy sense...?"

"The first one rather, alas. What's the way to the Tao...? The master answers, Up the rectum straight to the stars. Another neophyte asks, How does it feel to feel that blissfully inhuman condition, Zen? Answers the geezer, farting as loud as he can: Catch!. A third fool asks, What's meant by the sacred name of Buddha...? The master goes back behind the shrubbery, rescues one of his discarded shit-wiping sticks. Precisely that intangible smell."

"Wow. Creepy religionists. They are all the same the world over... Aren't they Jesuitical...? Though, in this Chinky case... The student what he really learns is never to ask anything. And if he does, he's told shit up rather than

the much plainer shut up.”

“But enough about ca-cas. Voilà, supper’s ready. Let’s feast.”

Under the aegis of the blunt spittle of the snow, with tiger-like ferocity, the two friends went at it. “Gee-willickers, but it’s good!” Maximine praised, her felt shirts speckled with food, for they had chosen to eat with their fingers as the crippled host had forgotten to provide the table with forks, knives and spoons. “Good-riddance to clumsy machinery,” they had declared, oblivious to the terribly silent hue and cry raised by the shades of their more educated ancestors.

Snuggly wrapped in each other, under the covers, in the hollow of the bed, where the homely long-fasting child, or the woman-sniffing-cum-diddling dude, or the homebound eager cripple would have his tail and his nose (two-faced slippery Oriental devil, much like unto an elephant, alas) both well cared after and well “shone” through, all said and told, once the long snuggling were (if ever) concluded, was going to come 16 times in a row (in the meantime, Maximine, as per her custom, would come none,) told themselves now and then cute confidences...

Roughly at the same time, roughly at the other end of town. Bobby the unpublished writer and Marietska Baratinsky, the maid, were also cozily enwrapped in each other’s members at the sunken middle of the little bed in the writer’s den. The woman was relating some more episodes of the deadly Baratinsky exploits... Bobby at her side, was beaming, he was enjoying the racy proximity, her tits’ softness, the animal effluvia of her young crotch, her hairy legs, her endearing accent..., even the exotic flavors of her foreign farts — that was happiness — wasn’t he a blessed author...? How many millions upon millions of wretched authors wouldn’t have given up an arm and a leg and a neck to be in his situation...

He cooed, he bleated, he purred, he snored, he fizzed, he got slapped, he smiled, the image of contentment in the densely perfumed, densely balmy, densely top-heavy dimness of the many-layered carpeted room...

Maximine was saying: “Snared by such scoria, the hapless creep. Which time is it...? He might be in bed, already. With her. Though be not afeard,

my friend. No hanky-panky whatever. He is like Sartre, another impotent chump, bedding the girls, but only for kinky, rather “curly” reasons... Curling together, sharing the warmth and the intimacy, thus pumping them all the better, the closeness and the penumbrae helping a lot to bring along the murmured protracted confidences... That Marietska Baratinsky! I hate them all, the Baratinskys. They’ll be yet the death of me — their family story. I’m up to here with them all. And booooring... All miracles, and sickness unto god, and tremendous heresies — shit!”

Bobby was “taking notes” just by clicking on and off a tiny electronic word recorder. The Baratinsky babbled no end.

“I didn’t know Bobby was such a well-known writer. Like Sartre, you said?” Chuck’s nose was embedded in one of Maximine’s savory oxters.

“No, the crazy bastard writes a novel a month. Millions of novels he’s written by now. He says he’s so creative, he gets them out of the air, he says, god-like, ex-nihilo, he says; I say, no, not ex-nihilo, ex-silly-girlie-oh.”

“He’s very keen with them young things, then?”

“No, you are not listening. Emerge, what are you doing, burrowing in like a freaking yellow rabbit...? You make a hole in there... He doesn’t hire them for fucking, he hasn’t fucked in decades. Writers are like this... No stamina left for the activity, too physical for them...”

“Or maybe is the essence. Not enough of it. It figures, of course. According to the sages and the wisdoms of the ages, the brains and the balls draw from the same substance.”

“Another red-neckish rural myth, my poor boy... Some of them are not really ugly, those wenches... But, god, are they stupid...! We’ve had them all. Any kind, you name it. That’s the sole task of his agent, not of finding him a publisher, they’ve given up on that before starting — a wise move too — no, he just has to find the girl belonging to the ethic group Bobby wants to write about that month...”

“She’s the help. The help in the writing. The muse, you mean?”

“The help in that and nothing else. The bitches don’t do shit at home. Only lolling about, and talking... Gee, they talk! They talk or they are sacked. Marietska, at least today she answered the phone. Sole chore she’s liable to have accomplished in the whole freaking day... If she’s not in the mood, she does not even do that... They are there to add a bit of panache, to enhance the situation, if you will; a social maid, you could say, employed for purposes of cachet; they open the door to the visitors..., they speak their foreign crap... They jiggle their asses... They never cook, never go shopping for groceries, never clean the house; other people have to do this... He hires them just to suck them dry, of information, of snippets of village lore... When he’s not writing, there he lurks, always at home, after the maid, pestering her to exhaustion — he gets socked now and then, once in a while, the insistence getting on the nerves of anyone, with the foolish grisette today maybe having a nasty period... Shingilla, or Priscilla, or Futilla, whatever... Girl, come on, come on, don’t make me suffer like that... Tell me about this, and tell me about that... Pumping the poor girl for writing material, until there is not a drop of ink to waste in her, not a worthless anecdote left in her... Once they’ve been sucked dry, he sacks them. Don’t worry, no exploitation whatever — unless is the other way around again — he’s been doling them green smackers by the sheaf, like they are damned manna — and those are only tips for nice obedience — he pays them beautifully, and then... the severance fee amounts to a sizeable marriage dowry — she can now get a splendid trousseau which lands her some creep — that’s their universal dream — for most of them, anyway — landing a fellow, so that now they can slave their life away for the abusive creep. Up until now she was working for money, now she’ll work for free till the end of her married ordeal... Stupid, unschooled broads, I’m telling you — they don’t realize that no man will ever again, not by a long shot, be paying them the attention Bobby paid them — Bobby will always be their vital high point.”

“A Maecenas.”

“A passing angel of beatitude. Glorious Bobby, remembered fondly all over the freaking world, for decades to come. In a hundred years, old centenarian little ladies remembering the American miracle. An immensely kindly man that for a month provided to each and every one of their desires, that even worshipped them, that went to all sorts of privations to make them happy, only so he could hear them talk...”

“And a saint.”

“The month over, the novel done, is bye-bye. And they richer than ever they could hope to be at this early age short of robbing a bank or winning the lottery... So now the same song all over again. Here the new girl comes along. Broken English, strange habits.”

“A new maid with every novel. How resourceful.”

“He’s never published a thing — posthumous glory he hopes — the documentary work of a century — last of the primitives — the indispensable cultural link from the monkeys to the starlings.”

“Ain’t that a bird...? You notch his tongue with a little cut underneath and it can talk better than a parrot.”

“Maybe he should hire a parrot next, or a multilingual of a talking starling. I meant, an inhabitant of another planet. A lunatic. A Venusian... Anyway he pretends his books are all dyed-in-the-wool studies in a particular ethnicity or other. And the only thing he does is copy the drivel these silly girls tell him...! You tell me the rubbish! Now, sure, he’ll be proud to write the lame invitation to our big anniversary — he’ll include some jaw-breaking Polack shit — and then the hackneyed turd, as always: Come celebrate life with us, for life’s a-waiting at our humble abode... Something lousy as that... As always. All his published stuff is like that, nonsense of this sort — social communications we issue ourselves — somebody in the family croaking, some birth, a marriage... He’s a stickler for words, he says. But that drivel is all that reaches the public. He takes great care in fashioning his little cards — with a quotation in the dying tongue of the idiot he’s working on — or with — imagine: all those unsophisticated poor lasses, hardly able to read, and then..., choosing with him some pertinent ditty in their quaint little language, and then he adds the zinger, in English — ah, and, let’s not forget, his signature at the bottom to authenticate the authenticity of the author of such authoritarian writ. Yeah, such masterpieces, the freaking sucker.”

Marietska was pumping “da massa” — she’ll talk Negro for fun — an added

bonus — who doesn't love exoticism, above all in bed? And now she had nothing better to do, and he would pay handsomely for the little service...

Chuck was quietly coming for the umpteenth time. Maximine was disgusted with her rich husband and her seraglio or peasant tenderfoots...

"Pump them dry, and hire another, and another..., and another... To the infinite... Will it ever end...?"

"How metaphysical, ok?"

"Nameless wonders... You know...? Maybe you do, you being a Chink and all... Geography is peppered with people claiming to be the most crazy nationalities — ethicality gives me the shits. All those silly slubberdegullion girls... A Quichua, a Maya, a Cossack, a Kazakh, an Ibo, an Ubu, a pygmy, a Masai, throw in a Kurd — absurd!"

Chuck was too tired now. He said, turning in, covering his head and his eyes with his sleeping wideawake: "Not so absurd... In this manner, he knows profoundly about the world, about its amazing variety — the truth of it all deep down, first hand, from the horse's mouth, the mare's mouth — the nightmare's — and without moving a leg from home — a trip round the world with just another trip round his chamber... Hmm, a genius, your man..."

"A fucking passive static rotting scarecrow, you mean. One needs to go out and see the things close up and first witness, no intermediates of shit — you want to see the world, you want to see the elephant...!"

She realized she'd made a faux pas. "Oops!"

"No harm done, except the that was my dad's favorite saying."

"Oops, oops and re-oops, then!"

Bobby was sleeping, so was Marietska; Chuck's eyes were closing of themselves. Only Maximine, who knows why, was unhappy tonight.

14.

With Bobby sedulously taping her words away with his tiny tape recorder, Marietska, comfily ensconced in an armchair, was recounting some canard of hers...

—My uncle Jaroslaw pledged never to relent as a church's sycophant... One more, the umpteenth... He would get into a terrible lather, take out his fists, ludicrously bellicose, if any body for instance would take out its middle finger and point to the heavens with it, saying some heretical thing, sacrilegious and so on, as with this sing lies your salvations, in hoc signo salus... He drove it low, the first thing he'd do, serving a kick to the shins of the offender, if at reach at all... Oftener than not, my uncle Jaroslaw would fall on his ass...

—Of course, this is the uncle to whose house you went to live after your parents died in this arson-prone edifice, and now, an orphan, everybody in your uncle's family raping you at their heart's content, and Jaroslaw the first and most assiduous. And now insisting that you do the streets in order to bring in some dough...

—Exactly. Only that then one day he was angry against some swearing boys and he had an apoplectic fit. Since then he had a..., how you call it, a sickness of the psyche... He was unable to communicate even with relations... The body so frail, unmasterable... With electronic gadgets, he was always in dire conflict — they, the objects, always threatening to go haywire, to explode, to electrocute him, soon as he dared touch them... With the kitchen garden also, the dirt itself tilting, barren, unproductive, losing all the topsoil... With books, the missal, the gospels, contrary to his approach, refusing to yield, himself unable to read them, too tired and nauseous, incapable of opening the covers, needing a burglar's iron to pry them, and then of course unable to turn a page... Ah, and to get up, so

painful, the pain in the legs, insufferable... The plants around the house, even the vegetables coming from the grocer, they wither and die as soon as they smell him — the dirt itself rots and dries, dead cinders, if he as much as walks on it, much worse if he rummages in it... Incapable of playing at any game, everything confused, don't know where anything, any pebble or piece or männchen or figure or spark or dice belongs in or at or with or against... Or...

—Shit, poor man!

—Now he swears in German. “Unsre blöde existenz,” and so on and so forth. Did you know that the “bloody” the English make use of so much is just the word “blöde,” meaning stupid, not bloody, of course, but the contrary, bloodless, discolored, flat, disgusting, without taste nor stamina...?

—Somebody must have told me that already. In some Germanic novel must I have it, I'm sure. Limit yourself to the Polack garbage. The German one I've already covered.

—Ok, just trying to be helpful.

—You've forgotten about poor depressed Jaroslaw, the bigoted rapist?

—He became the fall guy..

—The fall guy for whom, for the scams of the church...?

—No, he would fall continuously, and continually. Every step, bang. Down the stairs, topsy-turvy. Badading, badadang. Falling all over the house.

—How nice!

—Then the bishop, fed up with missing the dough my uncle would give the church, sent a posse of bullies, a choir of young priests bent on making him

soft... I saw them getting up the stairs. They were blöde angry. “Fucking scamp, fucking bootleg, fucking squirrel,” they were cursing.

—Blackleg...?

—Whatever. Awful insults. And “I shit on his mother’s head,” and so on. One of them, he seem just the caporal of the punishing squad was looking at me, taking out his tongue, saying I want to lick you little snatchie up... The lieutenant very stern, in front. His head collided on a wooden beam, he cursed, he shat on the divinity, our house not the richest in the world, the lieutenant, enraged, took the rotten, insect-eaten beam and took it apart, bam! Pieces of ceiling falling on all of them. And little critters, millions of them... Falling like squirming rain on their heads... The young caporal going bonkers, thinking a very poisonous spider has taken hold in the hollow of his head, at the center of his pate, and gnawing away at his brains already... He runs down, taking some of the soldier-priest in his fall. Everybody falling helter-skelter, pell-mell, the horror, and me laughing, and uncle Jaroslaw, closed in the hermetically closed closet, shivering and sitting himself with fright. The apocalypse arrived. The lieutenant shouting: “A tornado, a tornado!” A tornado of what...? Nobody knows which kind of tornado he is talking about. He meant a tornado of swarms... For swarms of deadly little beasts are turning around his head... He has been fingered by the devil. His ideas have become in his brain crazy bugs who eat at his cranium... He fucks off from the house pledging never to return and pledging at the same time to resign from the devilish church...

—Excellent episode!

Bobby handed her five bucks. Marietska curtsied ever so faintly. Then she went on.

—The uncle in his little closet... With the conniption from the commotion, he went completely bonkers... He had to be committed into an asylum. The bishop asked for me to go to public assistance. Actually, when he saw me, he decided to hire me himself... He made me a maid of honor...

—Did he rape you too...?

—You bet.

—How odd. The happenstance of it. First example I hear about. I always thought most bishops went for boys...

—Polish bishops, that characterizes them above all others — they mostly go for girls...

—Well, I'll be... You learn a new one every day!

—At Krstrnska's airport...

—How do you spell it...?

—I don't, we'll have to research into an atlas.

—Okey-dokey. Proceed.

—At Krsnamrta's airport, we the select, the church's elect, had nonetheless to share our first class space... We were going to a bishops' congress...? A council. A concilium.

—Quite.

—Me disguised, as always, as a choir boy, an altar boy, a tyro beacon, canon, deacon... The skirts and flounces fitting me, you bet. Soon, I was already claustrophobically hot. The scent of steel... You know airplanes. I was glued no longer to the bull's-eye glass, outside of which the spectacle only got gaggingly worse... I was afraid, first time flying, making ca-ca in my knickers... And then incensed, but for real, longing to shoot holes all around, dreaming of sudden spray on decks and leeways... And, lo! — that high profile charred-neck-like representative made his entrance. I said, aiming my fury at the faggot: "Thank the double odium the idea of him provides," much relieved, somehow, for then I knew exactly who was the Turk's head of my unease.

—The Turk's head of my unease. How classic sounding. Here's five smackeros more.

—“Some tribes of natives are nothing but a bunch of soulless criminal cretins, swarms of insect-people much underneath the nobility of higher animals!” The faggot said. Next he checked himself, pivoted his chameleon eyes so that he might unexpectedly control every possible side concurrently, and, no doubt convinced that with his carelessness he had not flustered up after all any pigeon better left unruffled, now much sobered up, he evenly continued: “—Oh, I know, I should maybe display a greater understanding, considering my enviable position as a privileged spokesman for the greatest of beings, allay my rabid coyote of a righteous rage perhaps with an ounce of a toad's alleviating spit, but, no matter, charity is stretchable only to a certain limit... After that crucial point it's gotta break, of sheer necessity; that's fortunately dogmatic, otherwise we might as well be somberly knelling any other night, what, in honor of whose suicide...? God's only wife, verily, no less, worth more than a whistle, if you ask me, knock on wood.”

—Was that the bishop...?

—No, he was a Lithuanian. One of those orthodox creeps, a blackmail bishop, a pope...

—A pope? A dervish...?

—One of those, yes. He weren't Polish, so he was rather interested in boys. And he thought I were one... So I answered, coquettish: “Talking of which, your marvelousness, if I'd be so bold — would you allow me a dearest confession...?” In order to further deviate his attention from my flounderings in such a dangerous position as the present then, where somehow I felt I had put my four hoofs in, oops, I jumped above the sticking mud instead, and trillingly flew... He took a shot at me with his tongue and got me. Thank his heavens, how glad I was when I saw he had bitten, gobbled really, hooked.

—For deep down you wanted to surprise him, him the shock of his life.

Looking for boy treasure and finding the snake's pit of your womanish sex...

—Something like that.

—Where was your holy protector, the Polack bishop.

—I learned afterwards he was sick in the plane's loo, vomiting his guts, plane-sick with the movement.

—And now the Lithuanian dervish said...

—“Follow your blessed soul's nose, sonny,” he cooed, “only scorpions ignore the lifting of the conscience's strict curfews — they behave like cannibals not only in company, of course, but when in their veritable solitude too, gone loopy-loop-loop in solitary, nobody to clear for them what are regrets and what remorse... Muddled heads, stinging their own shadow, devouring it whole, leaving none for the savior, a mess!”

—I said: “Well, your tempered explications sure took their toll on the two factions of my warring inclinations, male-female, right-left, unique-dichotomous, straight-schizo, you know, many and none, one and the other, reality, mirage, solipsism, objectivity, self, the universe, the inter and the outer egg, truth and shameless propaganda... What I mean, your graciousness, I feel so pure only by the sheer proximity of your odorous sanctity, yep-yep, my father. You've managed to kill in my inner battlefield so many of those darting bluebottle flies keen on laying their eggs on the rottenness of the flesh of the ideas that just conceived have died already..., that, in verity, I'm resuscitating almost.”

—He must have been impressed.

—Seduced. I said: “Clear-headed and valiant, then, I will, yes, I will deposit in your motherly lap the egg complete of my most cherished doubt for you to crack and expose to the air vivifying — born at last like a little personal messiah...?”

—Messiah...? He weren't a Lithuanian kike on top of it!

—Well, listen, he had a big nose for starters, ok? I might have savior, who knows? Messiah seems now more appropriately suitable, or moot.

—Hmmm!

—“Talk, talk, my neglected, negligee-ed fetus!” With a genuine knot in his throat, the pope parlayed. Unless, of course, he was playing the game, or the fool's role, for later attacking at all fronts.

—Negligee-ed because you had on pajamas provided by the company for the first class customers...?

—Why not?

—And fetus, because you were so curled...?

—Right on the nail again.

—And you answered...?

—I said, coyly: “Well, you see, the mystical case is — I always wanted, even since I was two and half or so, always desired more than toys or rubbish like that, you know what, to get famous, extremely famous. At any price, in whatever legitimate category, get famous. Mother and dad incessantly fighting: “There is god, you whore! No, there's none of it either, you priest-buggering buckethead!” The both of them all day like this. You'll excuse me the harsh sincerity, no? For the sake of the document and its future epistemological value, we owe it to ourselves too, when our sanity's last stand needs all the ammunition possible, no buzzing bumblebees of false prejudices distracting..., am I right? And least of all in a loaded confession.” “I'm all with you, my pet. How must you have suffered. Fear of dying, is that it...?” “In a way. Yes. The point was to get famous, of course. Get invited by the pope, I mean, the archimandrite, of course.” “Ah, the

archimandrite, ever so lavish. Splendid choice, my boy!” “In his awing presence, representative, most true and only true one, with all the papers cleared from on high, of god his father, father... When I’ve kissed his ring, I get readily up, try to hit him edgewise with a question I’ve got prepared in my chest since I’ve been aware I’ve got a conscience to take care of too... So, without warning, there’s my fling, I batter away, I smatter: “Archie, say, do you really believe in god...?” “The gall, my little dear, you must have really ached. The agony, I imagine.”

—De Gaulle? De gueule degueulasse...? Is that the big-nosed didonk general...?

—What...?

—You said, let me rewind... Here, when the archimandrite...

—He is not the archimandrite, the archimandrite’s his boss.

—Well, he says: De Gaulle, my child, how harrowing, and so on...

—He means: the balls you have of asking the fucking pope of the popes such a stupid question, does he believe in god.

—Yeah, heavy-loaded. He must have been abashed.

—His regard was fixed at my crotch, trying to see the impossible — my little pee-pee boning up...? A quandary or a mystery to solve deeper than the existence of the gods... A girl sporting a bona fide boner.

—What happened next? How thrilling!

—I said, demurely: “Alas, at my age, eight and half, there’s practically no chance already I’ll ever reach the secret goal of my life; too late indeed — bar the odd miracle, of course. No, I don’t despair, but I sure oughtn’t let pass this opportunity. I guess you are the next best thing to the

archimandrite, saving the distances, I know... Providential, really. Here, unbelievable luck, I'm telling myself, from the moment you deigned sit at my humble side... I being nobody, god only knows when another possibility like this will present itself again... A learned pope! Zero prospects, I'd bet, really. Small wonder if... So, anyway, I ask the same of you, please, your vicariousness... — should I amend myself...? — your surrogateness...? Your saintliness...?" "Whatever," he said, red in the face, his hands nearer and nearer to the blank point between my thighs, "but I will answer you with outright truthfulness and clarity, and I will dispel all of these silly girlish qualms unworthy of such a sturdy little boy as you, I'll respond and truthfully, like I'm your goody-goody witch, done...? Are you ready...?" I heard... The long tirade... Futile timber falling alone bothers not sounding the tiniest of alarms — I know, he knows, wrong clue... Everything is god-willed, -sent, -juggled... The movie director almighty, greatest authority, unflinchable, unavoidable, unjiltable, impossible to discuss the scene with... — hell, paradise, purgatory, limbo, a deadly VD, a plane crash... — the all-obeying fatalists get the best parts, the favorites they are, Pascal, saint Ignatius... It is his movie (god's,) forget it not; moves the tables (timetables, tabulae rasae, geological, astronomical, medium's, media's, mathematical, ask me if I know,) moves them at will, every time his own belch tells him — divine whims — we, nothing but his listeners, his watchers, his clique... Don't you feel him fumbling even in the intimacy of your body — it's called soul, conscience — robots, preprogrammed... Plus even the more worthless natives adore, even the animals higher, the plants aspiring, nature, the universe, you can't explain something from nothing, the contrary neither, I know you are afraid of dying, yes...? Meanwhile, in the best of the typical style scholastic, he indoctrinates the pupil, feeds him the usual pap, boring for him and for you, but — ah, delicacies! — he caresses meanwhile the obedient pupil's inner thighs, softly milks his cock, appraises, delicate tennis man, the pupil's couple of irregular balls... All so predictable, though, alas, a tree of knowledge stunted since the stoned age. No surprise shoot, oops, unexpectedly branching off with an amusing pirouette, no climbing mooning starbound pretty callipygian Sally of a boutade of the healthy sort would've created havoc in the nicely molested boy's spirit, long ago, in his tender mint condition stick-it-to-him face pincushion of a credulous age. No. Well, no heathenish overtones, no atheistic fun poked at the resistible incumbent... "God, my son...? A chest of jokes, a barrel of laughs; philosophically speaking, the delirious flare of a tumbling dog too fond of the dust of its mongrel arrears of a genealogy; historically (but anybody knows that,) the crude excuse for all the crimes the huge ever incurred in, of all the tantrums the middlemen threw in (into the social bargain, and — let the understatements roll — to paltry national tyrannicide they counter with a state genocide; a man-god, a king is worth

many an ant hill with millions of people small..., ricochet to nebulae the cruel reprisals...,) last and least, the overly repulsive revenges the microscopic underdogs were ever able to muster up during the lulls, after the poking and the probing of their little bug communities, after the extremely annoying in-roads and the sticks of dynamite...? As for the hopeful behind, his Manichean twin, his name, what, Ahriman Satan, whoever, the nasty-fellah principle, bad cop of the other's good one, I only wish I could tell you that is him I serve in reality. Point of fact, though, my son, that'd be but the complement of the same lie. Whom do I recognize as master, then...? Necessity, ambition, a career... You see, go at it, fuck, arrive somewhere, a ledge fine enough up the climb to old age, and now sleep in tranquility, leave my life dormant, on its own, rolling along, latent and purring... A dream... The alternative is nix... I'm a kid again, the chosen almost among the protégé's of my Jesuitical philosophy teacher. His finger teasingly circumvolutes around my sphincter... While I repeat the lesson with a dutiful mien, somewhat bashful, blushing sweetly as a tulip about to bloom, I am panting for the real adherence, the proof of his appreciation true. Finally — ah, what pleasure, what a reward! — he reams his rascally finger up my rectum. Down over there, on the common folks' stalls, that side of the ex-cathedra platform, the rest of the boys of my class envy my luck... See my flawless expression of bliss... Know I've earned myself for sure an optimal note again... Most of them, the lumpen bag, what, grab in spite, under their particular desks, their mean penises... Wish they got them longer, fonder of games, much more responsive, malleable, fun to play with..., two rosary nuggets for balls, the thrilling soft skin of a fawn's beautiful ass, and so forth on that exciting bouquet of a line..., but their kits, what, by comparison they are each a blunt unhandleable fraud of an invalid's morbid excrescence..., nothing to boast about..., so, while I'm being publicly selected on account of my superior gifts, and, better yet, privately pampered and loved, future-propelled, I feel sorry for them, secretly administering that torture, that uncouth castigation to the future insurers of their matrimonial peace... I mean their testicles, only asset we are provided the rest of a body to protect... For what's life but the passing of the genes...? Same ass for a dog than for a chicken than for a monkey than for a lizard than for a human. An asshole near a cunt or a prick, as the case might be, but all the wherewithal only there in order to keep very temporarily, fleetingly safe the eggs... The eggs only, the eggs... The top egg, the archimandrite, no more than an egg-carrier than the littlest, meanest egg-carrier among the worse sinners... Egg-carriers all... And the rest of the song, added garbage... Oh, but I know what you are thinking across this balderdash; skipping the lines, are you, the in-betweens even, eh...? Naughty boys. You are telling yourself: Get up, relay the cops, rely on swift justice, ride the cobbled roads to the ambassador, interrupt the pilot, the

pastor rouse, the mayor interpellate, tell on him fast, and so on... Shun the wedding spiel now, don't be a fool, leave it for later... A few perturbed children, their minds defiled by a criminally idiotic ideology, so, what's new..., they spun out their phalli, nervous, wretched wrecks, until they got 'em looking like those of pigs', twisting to the winds... They're all ignorant farmers now, the villains of the stories..., become 'the other' each one of them, the fall guy indeed, a fallen prawn, pawn, in the mass uncounted..., villains in vile tales..., and all the rest of the boring lie-riddled stories in the romantic world of history, novel and romance... What a bore! But here you've got already the denounceable attempter on your life, why go on... Contact the guy, he is the culprit. The fellow is the link of the 'Secret of Life' on this country, Lithuania, Poland, Italy, maybe, secret society, cabal of shit-licking priests to Mammon, me, him, one of the 'Secret-of-Lifers' principal chiefs himself on his repellent episcopal flesh, thus disguised... My boy, life's so sad... I must do penance, let me cry above your lap..."

—Good copy, by gingo! All this of the plight of priests... Let me amend, of priests and writers... We've all been messed at, with, as infants... I liked my messing masseurs too, fond memories of being wanted... But, what then...? Did he then discover your little twat...?

—What...? Listen, wasn't that a mouthful, though...? I'm done for now. I'm going to get some tea, want some...?

—One more thing, Marietska, my pet.

—Later.

—Please... It will be worth twenty bucks... But no nonsense, no rigmarole, no strings of words with neither reason nor rhyme, and then I'm left holding the candle of shame..., so abstain, ok?

—I'm thirsty...!

—It's about the invitation I've got to write. For the 25th anniversary...? Look, I've some experience... More than twenty years, a girl a month... I recognize most of your tricks by now. I don't mean you. But most of those girls, all so profane, and repulsive... Some of them pretty scurrilous

bitches... So, don't imagine I don't know you girls; you girls are very canny...

—Come on, come on!

—So no fibs, no obscenities, no scatological whammies that time, ok? I'll check it in a dictionary, I warn you.

—I'm dying...

—I just want you to write me, in a nice Polish way, the following: "25 years of happiness are 25 year of bliss in your wallet..." We'll pass it as an old Polack peasant ditty or hoary hallowed adage... Agreed...?

—Pass the twenty. I'll write it in the kitchen.

15.

Coralline had been crying over the old photos. As Nina entered the apartment, she immediately realized what had happened. The red eyes on her friend' and boss' gaunt pallid bulbous splotchy face...

On the table, landslide-like tumblings of mountains of old photos — those old photos in the old shoe boxes, the sole bequest Coralline got after Chuckeline's passing...

A mock grin now on Coralline's suddenly aged face. Plus a bogus yawn. Faking sleepiness... Stretching a bit, pretending extreme fatigue...

—Poor Coralline... Thinking about old times... The sleight-of-hand of the pitiless hours... Disappearing wholesale before even leaving a mark.

—A mark or two they leave... Ha! Look at my goggly eyes, at the arthritic claws that used to be hands...

—You are plugging yourself with a rap not even the bad egg of the bad-egg —good-egg routine of the two turdy cops would plug you with. You are in good company here. Let's hear about it... What ails you so deeply... Is the passing of everything so fast, isn't it? Old photos kill with lethal little pills of sorrow... Millions commit every second suicide in front of shitty piles of shitty old photos... You want me to burn them...? Little impish murderers in mufti... Well-disguised little nasty creeps...

—No, you are so funny...! But it is true, I'm in there, depicted, myself, in the some of the most recent ones, a few years back only... It is me, and yet how different...! How much of another, an unknown, a nobody that never existed...! I was thinking: Who were I then, who have I ever been...? Just a figment. Even now, while I speak, just a figment speaking...

—I'm fixing you a strong grog, eh?

—Look..., here, enhanced, is Dick's sister, dead at thirteen.

—At thirteen, poor thing!

—She was murdered. They found her corpse, headless, on a bench on a public park.

—Headless! How did they know it was her then...? They could've dressed the young dead broad with the clothes of Dick's sister and take the sister to Turkey, to be another crappy Caucasian whore there; very appreciated, you know.

—Well, the cops' doctors must have had the tools to ascertain if...

—Wait! DNA, duh!

—Yeah, but was it already invented...? I don't think. The murder happened fifty years ago or so. Of course, when I say invented, I mean, discovered, made apparent, made to be... For it was already existing, it was there hidden, a mystery to be unveiled, DNA, I mean...

—Have a swig of that.

—Good. Thanks. You know, many things are but don't exist... Like god — a concept, a word, a belief, but nobody there — no existence, zilch... It is, but just a fiction — like a teeming emptiness, a black whiteness, an elephant-sized flea..., any oxymoron you care to name. By naming it, it is, but still this doesn't make it exist, in fact it can't, for it is an impossibility.

—Isn't it good? You want a little bit more?

—On the other hand, can you ever exist without being...? Yes, for being is only the awareness of presence — for instance, DNA — there it was, existing by itself, but without being recognized, without the status of being

at all, because its presence wasn't acknowledged by anything, a word, a concept, a hunch, an intimation, a belief... Nothing. So it existed, but as if didn't, nobody the wiser as to its existence, in reality then not being... If you are not there, you go uncounted. Remember the party for Chuckeline's good-bye...?

—Poor Chuckeline, and the girl, so young also, poor thing! But enough of depressive thoughts, that's what brought you down to begin with...

— We were all there, anybody could count us... Thirteen, fourteen bitches all told. Now, there's only two — you and I. Same room, same locality, but the existences severely curtailed... And, as you say, if we should invite the same party-goers, there at least would be two of them missing altogether. And the rest altered, maybe in subtle ways, maybe in awfully crippling ways, but all altered all the same by the passing of the space between the then and the now... The two missing still would be, for they are in our memories, but they would not exist, for they are dead, I mean, my mother-in-law, and that poor mousy girl, Naveline, her stupid father killed them both...

—He could have died falling down the stairs, the enormous sack-of-shit, our friends would still be alive.

—...they would be missing, but by being missed, they'd be, even when non-existent any longer.

—Yeah, very deep.

—Wow, and how many "things" then there must be that exist without being, without anyone of us, or anybody else, being conscious of them...! Well, let's count, let's count nonentities...! There are all the mysteries, all the undiscovered recipes for definition... Who knows what there is in store for the "forscherungists," the progressive investigators...? What if there are other beings with better definitions of the quandaries and formulae of being...? They are there, perhaps, but they don't exist, for us, because we've never seen them. A contrario, we've seen, in films and in cartoons, plenty of odd-looking others inhabiting the planets of far-flung stars. They are, for we've seen them in picture, we can picture them, they are; if you want, they

even exist in our fancies, but there's a safe bet that they don't really exist anywhere else; they are godlike in this aspect — existing or rather being but only in the barren wildernesses of our minds... There is maybe an infinitude of items existing, but not being, for us, in regard to what we can catalogue as extant — they are not there, because as yet unconceived — and, because we don't have an inkling of them, they are unnominated, unnamed, unfathomed — they exist, if they do, in their unrecognized aloneness only, but they are not on the ledgers of what's know, what is. Not in anybody's mind... Like what, for instance...? Well, here's the rub. As soon as you name them, they start existing, even if non-existing, they become — and, if they become, they are...

—Wow indeed. Nasty philosophers, the garbage they come up with; damn them, all this useless pedantry...! No wonder sometimes you can't sleep at nights... If instead of all that heavy stirring and peppering of the already hot enough and boiling and overcrowding broth in the brain, you'd be reading about Nero Wolfe or Donald Lam...! Perfect anodynes... The prose so luminous, the action so tame... You finish the page, shut your eyes with a smile, such worthless shenanigans the smoothies in the page go through... Wallow in the anticipation of what they will come up with next page or chapter... Some silly twist or other, leisurely told, to slow exhaustion... Yeah... Tomorrow a little spoon more of them as a nice sleep-inducing dose...

—Donald, Nero, a dog's name, a duck's... Names for the children I never had... And now's too late...

—Com on, no regrets now; that's the hormones, some deprivation of the blood; with it, every word associates itself with sadness...

—Consolation, yeah, that I need so much of... Thanks for you friendship, Nina. You are a true friend. Always there in my hours of need. I only hope I can be so nice to you if ever the situation arises where...

—The hell is that...! Is that Norwegian...? No, it ain't. I don't understand a word of it...

—It's Maximine's. Their 25th anniversary celebration invitation, written by

that awful disgusting slug, Bobby...

—It's all in gibberish!

—Except by the end, where he says, "by the grace of god, be there."

—Too weird! Let's talk about that hapless driveling imbecile, Bobby. Otherwise I'm afraid tonight I'll be haunted by that headless girl...

—He was always spying through holes... When caught in flagrant violation of the most basic norms of conduct, he'd sneer, and he constrained the discoverer of his heinous crime, even when armed with a rifle or a shotgun, threatening to explode his fucking spying head, he'd oblige them to see his wounds — horrendous holes where his stomach and bowels and balls and prick should have been — he'd swallowed a live hand grenade in Korea...

—I didn't know Maximine's husband had ever been anywhere...

—I'm talking about Dick's sister's murderer.

—Ah!

—His face was angelical, it seems. He'd spy just to rake his brains with undefined, unqualified remorse... Thronging, throbbing... With desires unrealizable... He'd go to the parks..., he had the ability to pluck any girl he fancied, even from the arms of her lover. The girl would grow immediately disgusted with the other fellow. She, as mesmerized, would follow the angel home.

—He could do that? A magician, an arch-druid, a warlock.

—His piss was deadly. He'd piss with a canula. A little reedy spout down there... You know how human piss — and also Dalmatians' piss — not the piss of other dogs or cats, or what have you, which is harmful — but human piss is so good for plants, such healthy nourishment...

—So is shit, I've heard. The best salads growing on human shit.

—Yeah, well, that fellow, the sister's beheader, before each murder, he'd make a point about pissing on the base of a stately oak or beech or sequoia or whatever in the park. The bigger the tree the better. Well, the big tree would be killed outright...

—Spooky, a devil of a devil if there was one. Imagine killing a millenarian tree with a single jet of piss! If could do this, he was an angel indeed!

—At length, this is how the stupid cops knew when the murderer would behead another divinely enticed, angelically allured girl. By seeing, from one day to another, another enormous tree dead overnight by the killer's piss. They, the cops, killed a great many number of them tree bole pissers before they caught the bloke...

—Don't piss behind trees. Too suspicious, my friend. Be frank and open-faced. Piss only in the middle of the meadow.

—At last they raided the phantom's lair...

—It was under the opera house?

—What? No, nothing to do. It was a little rambler house not unlike the one Chuck owns... Eyewitnesses reported — all this I know because Chuckeline once told me — that when the cops came, destroying everything they encountered, he had already died... Died and buried himself with girls' head, a million or two...

—That many!

—Over that macabre tomb, a marble flagstone, with this classical caption etched on top: "Sta, Viator — Heroem Calcas" — "Fuck off, walker, for you are standing on a hero" — still remembering, to the bitter end, his life in the military...

—The high point of his wretched magic-blessed life.

—There were romantic sentimental spectacular photos of fjords on the walls...

—Fjords, how creepy indeed!

—He had been ruthless, that bilge pump of a Peeping Tom with no guts nor glory of even a minuscule cock... He thought he had been toast that day in Korea when he had swallowed the live grenade as a stupid military dare... And yet he'd survived all those many decades...

—Many decades?

—Well, one and a half.

—The bitch, nonetheless.

—To ingratiate himself with his A-grade gods, to whom he had many little temples set up all about, on every corner, around the chambers of his house...

—Was he a Jap, a Chink, a Buddhist...?

—So I'm told, one of those, an idol worshipper, a pagan.

—A pagan, a barbarian, still!

—Once three burglars had entered his house, when he was abroad, killing, seducing with his killer smile... Once inside, they didn't know what the fuck to rob... There were only temples and the offering, in front of the grotesque figurines, of heads and heads of little girls... The three burglars panicked. Raised a ruckus just trying to scamper, too terrified... The angel had a pack

of vicious starved dogs... They couldn't eat the heads, the heads had been dipped in a varnish which repelled the big beasts...

—The burglars were eaten...

—You bet, not a bone left. Just the prying iron bars, the bunch of old rusted keys, the jute sacks full of nothingness... There was a tattoo on his chest — the angel's, learned witnesses reported, some of those fellows that caught him spying into their warm family lives and he then horribly exposed himself to them, revealing the true nature of the beautiful angel he, once again dressed in whites and shiny grays, was... It quoted Horace (I think): "Olim truncus eram ficulnus," "I used to be the bole of a fig-tree..." And underneath another verse, though in a tiny type, "Now I'm just an itchy fig."

—Hmm. How sexist, the male-chauvinist prig.

—Don't you think...? Boy, my thought precisely when I learned about him!

16.

Maximine came with the uplifting news. "Do you know that Suze the Thai tried to stab her aesthetician...! Actually, she did more than trying, it seems. She's been arrested and all. Dick says he regrets but they won't be able to attend our silver anniversary party. Well, good-riddance...! She pretended to be extensively invited. She intended to bring her extended family in. Imagine. All those little monkey-like young people behaving like pigs, blundering their way away, pigging up the food — and destined to die so young..."

"But why...?" Asked Nina, very interested.

“Well, it seems the aesthetician found she was too slim...”

“Too slim!” Incredulous, Coralline.

“No, I mean, why are they doomed to die young, the youngsters in Dick’s wife’s family...? Is it a genetic bane...?” Nina, pounced, seemingly very worried now. “I so hate seeing young people die. Don’t mind so much the old croaking, of course. Law of life, lay of the land. But I’m pretty young now myself... And... And all those poor young simians...? Soldiers sent to war... To fight the radioactivity, to shower the white phosphorous about... Like varmint-killing vaporizers, flitting the human flies...?” She encouraged.

Maximine had to think that one out. At length she answered: “Well, yeah, it seems that they are mighty jinxed, hexed; their mojo blet, bletted, unsound; grim grainy symptoms indeed, all of them wall-eyed. Suze the only fit to be seen of the lot. Barely. Very barely. A stick of a girl with limp tiny tits and a lip curled, such a nasty mien, with superfluous ears and engorged cheeks. And a perfume that lingers as lingers a lingering fart.”

“Must be one of these Oriental shits with cinnamon and cardamom and mummified carrion... Like this soy bean sauce done with rotten fishes, you know?” Vindictive Coralline pointed out.

“A sister of her, I’m told, escaped with her life by a hair. They were visiting a military compound in Alabama, she wandered out into the secret territory, the keep-off, we-shoot-to-kill area, the broad barely capable to read — of course, wall-eyed and all, you tell me how — and the loudspeakers shouting her name, and saying: ‘Fuck off, Lilygold (the hell if I know her real name), you are so fucking dead, Lilygold...!’ She almost died of fright. And then came the dogs, and mauled her pretty much... Then a cousin of her, the daughter of her aunt, had a friend at her side at the theater that suddenly died, in the dark, in the middle of a movie... They had gone to watch a horror flick, both of them girls were around twelve or so, and from the upper rows a waiter gone mad threw down a caldron of boiling oil — are you being served...? — a fried friend for you...”

“Wow, how terrible. They are really doomed.” Nina agreed.

“But wait,” Maximine poured on, “when they were in Arizona, you know they toured the States before Suze meeting Dick, a party went to explore the virgin bush... They encountered an eerie scary shack — a depot of some sort — there in the middle of the brush... Two foolish boys, nephews of her, Suze, dared go inside. Those Thais are real idiots. What are you seeing...? — those left outside would ask, shouting. The two boys said: There is a rear or end wall that’s all pockmarked with bullets — they shoot people in here, execution style — military, gangster, all the same — they line them up — they machinegun them by the twenties... And then they heard machinegun reports, the Thais outside... And the two boys were never seen again. Neither in the shack, when the coroners arrived and checked every inch of the terrain which they said had not been used since the military had secret prisoners there, nor outside, along the rough desert... Only cactuses, and vague skeletons and scorpions and rattlesnakes left... The two boys eaten who knows by what...”

“I’d worry if I were to marry into such a weird family...”

“You don’t know the half of it, Coralline. They have in their garden an idol knoll — a monticule full of niches from whence the malignant idols, comfily ensconced therein, with their big paunches and gaping navels, leer and peer out from the shadows... Gloomy garden of disgraces and sorrowful mysteries...”

“Booo...hhh...” Nina’s voice trembled, adding in jest some atmospheric creepiness.

“The family was outside, the occasion was the celebration of one of their barbarous holydays. Refreshments were being served. A guy was sketching, another photographing, some of the children were playing tiddledywinks at the foot of the baleful knoll... One of the boys, the littlest, the one who was keeping score, was aggressed by a bully, who accused him of cheating. The little accounting fellow complained: ‘But it tallies...!’, and his head struck one of these lucky stones they put for luck as an offering at the foot of the knoll of the idols. He tallied the stone indeed, notched it deep, with four rents of red. He died on the spot. Everyone went livid — a trick they manage I don’t know how, for the wogs are darkish indeed. The big kahuna

among them, the head of the family went leisurely inside, solemnly donned daunting trimmings and trappings, came out looking like a tops samurai or an emperor of the wall-eyed East... He said, more or less, in their lingo: 'As I'm the guy that cuts the mustard in this bloody family, I say that the little boy wasn't pushed by any of us — and less of all by the oldest son of my oldest one, you bet — but that the boys were scarfing away there nutritious food and little Jimmy here choked on a bone or something — the case: that, trying to dislodge it, at length he went wacky, and amok, lost it, lost his foot too, and badadang! He banged his melon on the offered lucky stone. Split pomegranate indeed. End of story!' Everybody agreed, except that this night, once the cops and coroners were gone, all the family with terrible pangs in their stomachs... Ptomaine poisoning, it was. Thirty-two of them died. Only the bullies survived. Vigor counting for something, of course. And the grandmothers, too fed up with the cloying shit they serve each year during the festivities. And abstaining. They too made it."

"Good for the grannies... They've seen it all..."

"How must Dick be regretting that ill-advised marriage...!" Coralline interjected.

"I should think so...! With his last drop of leukemic blood... Poor guy, how he must yearn for his life with you...!" Maximine barefacedly lied.

"And, moreover, to add injury to the gobbledygook insult, now with Suze in prison...!" Stoked Nina.

"Well, she's liable to get out soon, alas. Just being arraigned for the trial... The beautician, it seems, not dead yet. She had a hairpin pushed into her left temple, her brain attained till about 'midships... Going crazier by the minute... Who knows if she'll be able to testify... And if she testifies, what drivel will she spout..."

"Balmy, is she...?"

"Both of them now, the devil Thai to this unnatural nature born, the beautician by the pin thus chilled, higgledy-piggledy distressed... '—Where the fuck am I? Who the dickens am I...?' Her head in a spin, roofs strolling

overhead, weathercocks crowing at the wrong cues, plus hearing unsolvable oracles in her skull, and excruciatingly boring pundits underneath the wisps of her perm... They kill each other with such ease, don't they, those barbaric pagans of the devious East...? Always holding tight to the sanguinary tenets of their shibboleths, while the sparkling scaffoldings where they must hang shine enticingly before their insane eyes (that disappear with a smile, thence their terrifying eeriness.) Suze the ugliest of them all. Ugly duckling hanging by the neck until it snaps, and breaks as the blobs of a rosary recounting the steps down to hell..."

"Is she much contorted while in this awkward proceedings...?" Nina prodded.

"You bet," Maximine complied. "Her temper flaring, her taint turned a frightening cobalt, and the other day she blew her top, really, some churchman was extolling the pious and she trying to strangulate herself with her scarf, she fainted before dying, such a nuisance of a girl all told..."

"Whom are we talking, the hairdresser or the nasty new wife..." Coralline, somewhat lost.

"Why, both! She was also a Thai, a member of the family, the aesthetician, you know. They are so secretive and disgusting, and buddy-buddy, are they not...?"

"Christ, they fucking are!" Asserted Nina, most firmly.

"Avaricious, and stingy, and astringent."

"You've got them pat, Maximine, you do!" Nina's enthusiasm was catching. Coralline felt bloody better already.

"And she's such a cheap vamp, Suze, foolish overpainted monkey; shameless, showing her scrawny dinguses to the laborers even. Sometimes Dick has to beat the hell out of her. 'Will you behave...?' He says. And she nagging: 'My family will do you in, if only as far as you dare touch a hair of mine...!' Crazy bitch. I went visiting the other day. All these tales I know

from his mouth. I said, 'Dick, what's with your knuckles, they are all smeared with raspberry jam.' He says, 'Phooey, must be blood from the bitch.' He had a glint in his eyes..."

"Is he going crazy too...?" Full of hope, Coralline asked.

"Like a loon. I said, 'With all your mazuma, richer than Montezuma, and now complicit to a band of lousy wogs who conk out easier than flies under flit...' He answered: 'No matter, for the breed like cockroaches... The more of them die off the more appear. And I so want a heir to my house!'"

Nina approved: "A wacky-wacky line of reasoning, indeed. The guy is going under alright. Like a sitting duck. And his head shot off."

"I told him, 'Take off your blinders. You are being played for a flaking decoy. She's not going to give you an heir. She's going to be the death of you, they'll shoot out of the water, they'll inherit the lot; the lot of them rich as Croesus, bringing America down. America doomed, by hoodooed association. Don't you see everyone belonging to this devil-sheltering clan gets burned a mark of desolation on the folds of his soul...? And your bastard going down too..., mark of the devil. Misshapen to begin with, the product of a sewer seep, of miscegenation with the beast, slurping liquefied rubber, not milk, flawed down to his magnetic core, yearning for hell, home.' And he said, 'Get thee to a loony bin yourself, Maxicrabby. Fuck yourself. Her tribe lifts the spirits — when the flock lifts up as a man of many capes, as a flying tree of many winged leaves, the elegance, the sweep, the swoop...' He's crazy indeed."

"But for her, it seems..." Dejected, Coralline.

Nina reproached Maximine with fiery eyes. Said: "But wait, Coralline. The story's not finished. First, Dick beats the bejeezuses out of her. Second, he agrees that he's dying of a sickness unto the soul. Third, he only said that last phrase in apparent praise of his torturers to show how far gone he is in his head... That's how I see it, Maximine...?"

"And indeed you see it in the most orthodox way, my pet. Yes, he is going pazzo, and she is a devilish brute, and everything is shits between them... I

need a slug of something...”

Nina brought huge servings of cognac.

“He passed out after he’d faintly praised her. It was punishment from on high, or from his own conscience, enemy of himself. The thread between body and spirit blazing with the gleam of hell about to burst forth... What a distaste in my mouth only of being in his presence, and the fart perfume of the murderous bitch lingering in the background, I felt like vomiting, ruined house of rotten ghosts, I loathed the whole package, the while I had been there I had reneged on all my most precious values; what a terrible influence. I had to get out of there. The decaying house was haunted by the Thai bad luck. Nags appeared from behind every curtain. They all say: ‘Bush!’ to frighten me. I was wrangling with my own legs; abreast of me, they wanted to flee the farther, the sooner, the faster, the straighter the better. All that toil and zeal from all this awful women, her aunts, her mothers, her cousins, her ancestors, and the pestiferous boys, and wrongly attired old men, their trousers upside down, so witchy and stupid are they, I couldn’t get the hell faster enough out of that house of doom...”

The rant went on for an hour. With a smile, Coralline had fallen asleep on the couch.

Nina accompanied Maximine outside. Thanked her heartily. Their friend was so near collapse. Earlier that day, Nina had phoned Maximine. “Coralline is approaching a break down, she’s cracking up... We’ve got to do something to fetch her up to level sanity...”

It had all been an act of vast charity, all this wild slandering of Suze and hers... Now Maximine, all warm inside, was saying good-bye from the window of her beautiful new Lamborghini. She was feeling most surely blessed. Such a nice woman as herself, and deservedly, you bet.

Back from the brink, Chuck awoke. I'm crashing, I'm crashing..., he thought, still aloft. We are being poured down. A sea rimmed with a jagged range. Hiatal, ourselves, a funnel spiraling to the abyss. Rhapsodies of clunky noise, and then on a plate of metal, offered, uncooked.

A whale from Damascus, a dolphin called Damocles. Abyssal fishes for the candle-lit dinner. "Double serving for thy friendly costumer the shark, please." He's willing, he's rutting, he's a crotch-happy-slick guy with hunger and transgression in his mind. How suitable. His teeth like phosphenes of a fireworks-ridden night. And in a tense wait... Who'll devour the rest of my choice bits...? Who must, on musth with mustard, and in competitive thrust, like slaverling hyenas, or else on a first arrived first served leisurely plan...? Who'll recover (lovely expression, my pets) the carrion, who'll wrap himself and run with it, who'll adhere (good word too, soft soothing "willingness" is there somewhere folded in it as well) them odd morsels to the frothy lining of his womb...? Who'll finally digest and integrate...? In whom shall definitely steep and to better vistas be witness my blanched bones, my unequivocal wrist, my still warm beliefs, my enhanced links, my virginal cockatrice...? Am I due now, transmogrified, metempsychotic of sorts, at the real shrine of the faithful, the just...? Buddha, with Buddha's navel blinking at the fore, satisfyingly at court, presiding, smiling his devious smile... With a devious smile erasing the eyes, only the neighs being allowed to be left. Mellifluent, he parts the waters: "—The ay-sayers at my left, the nay-sayers at my right..." The horses saved, the elephant-crushed Chinese up for reloading: failed shot, fell short, try again, do better next time...

How symptomatic, he thought, eh. For a Chinese to dream dreams so Chinky flavored. Buddha-boudin, decreeing the shape of things coming. How quaint. Archetypal, maybe. From every somatic opening, my spiritual culture juicing away like mucus from a snail when broiled, edged finally that far off side of life... Yeah, jump in to the populously clogged sewer of the ages, vile gastropod... Crashing, ah, euphoria, where's my hatchet that I my add to god's act...? Crashing... How easy with a shell so friable, my friend.

He heard a mocking snort above his back. He was coiled, folded inside himself, boiling with terror, pretending he was mending the heel of one of

his boots...?

He glowered at the image of himself in the mirror. Shrilly he insulted his double, a rude racial epithet. He got up, stood on his hands, with his arms for legs he strode up to the low terrarium where the critters were squirming. Looking at them, upside down, with the leaves of lettuce the canopy of their sky..., he remembered. Ah, yes. His second dream had been much more pleasant.

A quasi paradise. The spiders big and colorful as birds, only their pincers and stings ominous... You could pick them up by the scruff of their necks. The parrots on the other hand were small as butterflies; and then smaller: as ladybirds; and smaller still, and a lot flatter, like seeds, like samaras, though still colorful, still alive, still beaky, still talkative, in tiny, not disagreeable little voices... What were they saying...? “Pick yourself up by the scruff of your neck.”

Also, the women, so free, naked and shaved, their nipples perking out, their fallocryptic clitties so prone to putrescibility when in the polluted cage of lowly planet Earth, so jollily protruding here instead, and healthy looking and even garrulous, also parrotty...? Clits claiming to be able to plead for their good taste at and in and of and with everything...? Giving tongue at being given tongue...? Come and have a taste. The thrill of it all.

But the men, aggressive as always, hating anyone’s success, coveting the neighbors’ sundry shriveled possessions, is that it, exactly like at home...? No, not in the least. You are totally wrong here. Men are all regular Joes, good-humored, and sensitive, and altruistic. They go to all kinds of lengths to make life most enjoyable for everyone concerned. At a pinch, they are only envious (healthily emulating, arch-praising admirers) of the others’ WebPages and the exuberant poems in there posted by each and everyone, for, yes, you bet, every guy’s a dedicated poet and artist indeed.

—But, hey, who works...?

—The drones do.

—The riches, the leisure, the electricity... Where does it all come...?

—Just as now, the drones at it all day, hidden, synergistic, all together now, producing the goodies non-stop. Nice problem-less beings without none of your foreshortened proclivities, like aiming to improve, or to catch up, or die in the intent... No, provided only with long-term purposes of accomplishment for the task at hand... Successfully neutered from all out-of-the-way ambitions... How convenient, don't you think...?

—But let's say, one of them had scuffed his toe at the foot of a heavy cutting machine... It bled...? Were they also neutered out of blood...? No bloodstained rags? No sickening unhygienic pouring of ugly infectious substances...? No cobwebbed slivers of bone protruding from the truculent breaks...? No whirling and squawking in pain...?

—Not at all, not at all.

—What about food...?

—Arrows.

—Arrows...?

—For duck hunting, rabbit hunting, mushroom hunting, snail hunting, and such. Ah, and the women are so fetching. And their spit is curative. And we commoners are allowed to stall and lollygag for as long as it so pleases us... No pining, no repining, all little bosquets of pines... With birdies in them, parrots, butterflies, spiders... Eden again, but improved a great deal. No misgivings, no lightning storms, only good sandwiches and cold frothy stout...

The phone rang.

Chuck lithely walked on his hands up to the kitchen table where the phone rested, feverish, shivering. Maximine wanted to know was he endorsing or not his attendance at tonight's feast. She assured him that the night when her Jag broke down and she had to spend it in his bed, he had sworn to his

obese gods to keep doing right and now she was suspecting him of meaning wrong, and thus she was recriminating upon him that he had not only not RSVPed but not even bothered to maybe unvirgin the nicely wrought envelope? Wouldn't he otherwise have phoned her, risibly commenting on the ludicrous new chapter of Bobby's published work?

He said: "Count me on, dear, and sorry. Too busy traveling exotic. I'll tell you all about it. As to what concerns the party forthcoming, I can only guess and hope that it'll be a doozy and a whammy and whopper, though surely withal not up to my dreams."

Maximine assured him: "It shall without a doubt be much better, you silly boy. Considerably, even sidereally, past your wildest. Poor Coralline will be there. Wait for the shock of her life. It's got to be fantastic. She thinks the Thai's in prison. In fact she's with child. Huge...! She looks like a skeeter knocked up by an elephant."

"Oi-weh, bitchy-witchy. Though it's true it promises to be grand. I'll be there. I'm just selecting my wheelchair de luxe..."

18.

Coralline, double-crossed, cried. Everyone awed, making such a great fuss about the tiny Thai's elephantine pregnancy.

The trees out the window themselves also expectant. Tilting their necks to peer inside. And the dumbfounded beasts of the wild climbing the trees to the bloody tops to be able to greet the great barely disguised new messiah with the ample tasteless skirts and the enormous bulge ahead...

Avaunt, ye klutzy pachyderm, avaunt... Avast, how could she! The shamelessness! A-wasting her fucking waist, what a waste of expectancy... Nothing to wait for but apocalyptic death... The devil reborn, the devil to pay... A-born for its millionth time in the millionth shape — a gook's, and a gook's, and a gook's — with no end in sight other than the end to end it all,

an immovable surfeit of gooks from end to end — with no room for a single other gook — ah, then, the horror of the exploded gook-ery! — big bang of the gooks — a gook head every dismembered gook — a gooky head: a planet careening to the infinite infinity, entering another doomed womb, a tomb... A tomb tumbling without rhythm nor rhyme — damned devils, you've killed even the illusion that the spheres ever danced, and that there was some music sublime — with you around, messing stridently around, how could it...?

Pish, Coralline! Forget the damned spooks. Disentangle yourself from their heart-piercing talons..., with their wily, subtler Oriental arts, they prey on you, wickedly, ruthless, no compassion. Ignore the backstabbing bastards. You recall, when suffering the last bout before this one, when you forbade yourself the company of beggars, so bad for morale...? Portents of what's coming too fast...? And how charity begins at home...? All that, and how true...? Altruism being another word for giving up...?

Reinforce your ego, remember the shrinks of yore. Push your mind out of those rats gnawing at the rat-nest inside your cranium. No. You'd do much better watching, through the tears, while mourning the future of disaster and tortuous extinction which is in perfidious store, willy-nilly, for all of us..., the throbbing tides of the moon, yeah, the matachini of the bats, so pretty, the devil's laugh with his starry teeth shining on the night sky..., he is handsome in his hideousness, some sparsely sown cirri for mustaches, some sailing spy planes exploding his zits — galaxies of bloody pus, blackholes of his many assholes...

She was blowing her nose. Alone, desolated, in the dark, having turned the lights off, looking out the window from an upstairs bathroom window.

She, Coralline, who that same morning had gone expressly walking for miles through sinister, stairs-ridden streets just to find the especially browned narrow baguettes Maximine so craved. And now this... Way-worn rover most egregiously jilted... The slap of the Thai present and blossoming. And the slap of all the other ugly fatheads fawning over the swollen skink..., and the slap of her ex-friends laughing each joke with such shrillness and forcefulness, grating her nerves, making her puke.

Beguiling the balls off everyone's faces and crotches, damned pollywog

who'd swallowed a hippopotamus... The spectacular wonder, shitty cheap circus, worse, disgusting carnival act with a couple of gagging freaks — one swallows the other, the other swallows the one, they vomit themselves mutually reciprocally all at once... Insufferable.

A woman withal who knew what she wanted — she and hers, incrusting and growing, a tumor with many heads, metastasizing fast, jumping like gymnasts, huge locusts, a plague, occupying every house, strangling the rightful owners of the land, crowding out the fair... Installing the dark devilish malignant imps. All her family here, all of the half a million of them, packed into treacherous Maximine's doomed abode, like into another damned mosque full of farting ass-elevating shit-lickers of the infectious ground...

Her dung-spangled skirts leaping with the kicks of the disease-ridden monster inside, apoplectic already, schizophrenic, epileptic, a devil to tie, yeah, it better be born spangled already, or you'll have your work cut out for you just to hunt it down and kill it afterwards... That provided that first you yourself don't perish during the effort. And the beast escapes... Egad! America down the drains, swimming down the prosperous sewers, drowning in an inundation of foreign bigoted slave-minded dirty-colored filth...

A hiccup. A recounting, maybe...? She was of two minds. I'm being unfair...? How much of the rage spite...? A verse. How apropos... "Odi et amo... Quare id faciam, fortasse requiris... Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior." Hating and loving — ask me why — the fuck if I know — but it hurts me, excruciatingly, ferociously...

Presages of floods where all is shit and cadavers... The Egyptians had it already pat... Didn't they... Waiting for the Duad. Saw it coming, and now's here, much nearer of course, 5,000 years in the offing, concocting, machinating — time to burst, the river, the Duad, a torrent of corpses and turds...

The fetid lummoX downstairs a bigger turd, the floater that broke the commode's back — first shot for the all-around revolution — start overflowing, all the toilets of the world...

She pulled the chain. Washed her face. Came out of hiding.

Still... The soul-rending chuckles and guffaws downstairs. The humorless clowns. She unmissed, totally ignored. Could as well get back home...? Or rather, what, get drunk...?

He heard somebody climbing up... Sobbing...

—Suze...!

—Coralline...!

—What's the matter...? Is it aching...?

—No. It's not that...

An awkward moment... Each asking herself of the other: Who is she, really...? Pivoting between centers of reference, lost at the unsettling peripheries, their personas off-the-mark, gone awol... No watchmaker of the vastnesses to guide their steps up the Tao of it. No heads nor tails along the baffling itineraries spanning the globe... So easy at home, but here...? Each, before, a referee of the spheres, maybe celestially musical, their cool conductor — a woman of parts, always at the center of the compass — the pinprick — all revolving around her — with inexhaustible energy, with the vision of a lynx, the snappiness of a crocodile's mouth, and so on... But now, in front of the other... The other, again, as hell incarnate...?

—Come, I'll show you a place where one is let be, unperturbed... An old bathroom for a dead maid...

Coralline helped Suze to the same concealed spot where she'd just had her cleansing cry. She shut the door. Suze gratefully eased herself over the commode. She pissed, a long pregnant jet which splashed for a while. Such an easy ability for comfort so easily acquired. So well together... Cupid's warm arrow at work. The two women sudden friends... It was night-time, time for confidences. The shallow beach not much in yonder made of fine

mud, the mud of tiny particles, millions upon millions of beings without qualities, their shells, their quasi-human skeletons...

“Are you craving for any food in particular...? I could go and fetch it in a jiffy. Mussels, oysters...? I know a path to the kitchen, unblazed.”

“Don’t leave me alone.”

They embraced. Enveloped in intimacy. The nice smell of both of their excrements lingering..., always the beautiful smell of the love-one’s feces...

Coralline kissed Suze’s tears. Salted, delicious, beginning to dry. Suze kissed Coralline’s mouth. Ripe taste of quinces slightly cooked.

“What happened...?”

“That awful Chink!”

“Chuck...?”

“Chuck, yeah, whatever, the mean malicious cripple.”

“He’s not the proudest proof of civilization, that we can be sure of. And after his accident, his malignity and deviousness increased, by a thousand fold at least. Chin in chest, cackling... Flocculent, costive, bleating, flatulent, scratching his crotch, cheering at the worst moment, checking the feel of your underwear even in front of strangers, no fear of scandal..., he says, Crinoline...? Popeline...? Silk...? Aerogel...? Nanocarbon...? Elephant hide...? His lax morals emerging like lymphs and pusses with the suppurant wounds at his useless legs.”

“It’s true, he came crawling with his monstrous chair just to squeeze my cardigan... And then he asked, Had I been fucked by an elephant or what... And started ranting against the heavenly dignified pachyderms... The heresies!”

“I know, he’s so offensive! A fascist, always glibly bickering beyond the pale with would-be partners of his. Of course, with his injury he feels safe, unattackable, he deems.”

“What do they feed you, you dwarfish cow...? — he wanted to know, and I never had seen him till tonight. Such barefacedness! Do you chew the cod with meadow fescue...? Farty to hell, not a fact...? Fucking elephants, the stink! (He says.)”

“So vicious!”

“I took a stance... I said, Let’s not veer into the abominable, my boy, let’s not be so shabby... He said, What’s the matter, can’t take another’s theologumena...? I said, The hell’s that...? Is that Chinese...? He said, One’s opinions about the gods...? I said, What have the gods to do with it...? He said, You obviously one of those idolaters, a worshipper of Ganesha, that’s why you let yourself be poked by an elephant..., were you tight that night...? (He joked.)”

—So cheap, always so cheap!

—Damned Chinese, not a funny bone in them; so unfunny!

—Oh, Suze, I know where they hide a plint, you know, a table for massage...? It would sooth you so! The porters and chambermaids of this house use it, I know, I surprised them once in an orgy of sorts. All ugly people, of course...

—But the uglies have to have some fun too... I know what you mean. But don’t leave me alone, please, Coralline.

They were mixed in a single unity of emotion and affection for each other, and compatibility. All so elegant, though. No turbidity, no turpitude of the imbecilic trumpeter announcing to sundry and all his wares of misery. Both the women plumpish, fleshy, a slight surplus of fat under the skin,

cushiony, a delight to bump into in a slight pumping rhythm...

As often those last days, penumbræ of pain from Suze's tummy. A crimson parallelogram which Coralline primly clutched, massaged. "My sweet poteen, you my putty, me your Pygmalion...", undefiled, clenching each other. Both their clamped together bodies shedding in-between their mucous seeds...

They dried up. Their recrementitious, superfluous secretions transferred to the spongy towels. And now they sat up over the thick slightly pissed carpet.

—Man, all that twisted gnarled yarn of nasty remarks against them... Why does he hate so much the stately noble animals...?

—The Chink...? He had his legs crushed by one of them, a she-elephant crazy for love. It was his predestination.

—We, the Bellvitges, our family animal is the elephant. Prominent on our family crest.

—Family crest...? Are you royalty...? Of course, I knew Thailand's is a kingdom, but I didn't suspect...

—We are nobility, yes.

—Wow! How fun it all must be!

—Well, there are some inconveniences, how do you call them, hassles, botherations... A few heads lopped off with every palace rebellion... Down along the paths of history, the slain, the slaughtered... Uncountable... The ship of state floundering... But then all is stabilized. Some general pawls the capstan... The ship is back in business... Gliding smoothly, swollen veils in the zephyr... The palace balls flourishing again... Pert brazen demoiselles in their viridian dresses and sparkling diamonds...

—How envious am I of all the glitter and brilliancy of it...!

—Then there are the fires... Cyclical, epochal... Like the cyclonic rains... What a silly excuse to intrude...! Here they come, the commoners, the fucking firemen, with their big-big hoses, and thick-thick dicks, sallow, infirm, never erect... And so noisome, and noisy. And useless, gaily proud, uniformed turd-sausages in the shitty tin-can trucks... The fire meanwhile catching in the notches of bygone eras, carved in every hidden place of the many vintage pieces of archaic furniture by princes and princesses enamored...

—How romantic, eh?

—You don't know the half of it... Listen, the clammy slubberdegullions climbing to the chambers of us young things, we daintily trying to keep afloat with so much water thrown in... You would think the rude minions would turn tail with a craven apology... None of it. They tear past the curtains and the canopies... They shred out flimsy garments... They rape you outright, without attempting even a rapid-fire pantomime of courtship... They contaminate you with every sort of coarse distemper, vd's galore, the crabs, the claptraps, the clap... And not a word of condolence, or of good-bye, the selfish brutes, now shriveled, shrunken, their braguettes full of flies, their flies, yes, oozing with the sweet spent liquors... And the fires collapsing the roofs...

—You must invite me to the palace some time...

—Next summer you are coming with us! Well, you know, your dear company, it shall be such a relief. Dick's such a an unsophisticated drip!

—Isn't he though! Such a wondrous nobody, and no clue as to what a woman needs...!

Adrift in their charmingly pungent ship upstairs, they seamlessly navigated the opposite fluxes crossing and re-crossing the stillness of the night... They had almost fallen asleep, when up to their slender lair the shouts of the harbingers of annoyance reached their recollected ears...

People were shouting all over corridors and stairs: “—Suze! Suze!”

“We’ll have to appear, regretfully...” Coralline came aground, the pawl touching bitter reality, their ship sadly stranded.

“...let me go first...” Suze the Thai, the dear honey who had driven Coralline to such heights of bliss, lazily said. Gasping and panting. Efforts of incorporation, with the big weight weighing her down.

Sacrificial almost, she gave herself up, emerged to the storm of the stupid guests, old Argonaut with all the thrills left behind. “You-whoo...! I’m here. Just resting a bit. Too tired, with the baby and all.”

Coralline waited, vaguely dreaming maybe of heroic firemen who drove their pawls home, catching the notches indeed, surpassing them by far, into the fathomless recesses of sensation... With Dick’s paltry dick no match at all... Not figuring even as an item to include in the figuring of who’s the best explorer... No badge for him whatsoever. A prick of a dick, Dick.

Then she also realized nobody had called after her, nobody, it seemed, missing her share of comparted humanity — it used not to be so before — how unimportant she’s becoming — the illness, her depression discarding her already from the world of the living... A mere individual in the flock now felled by the claws of the hawk — no matter, a new neighbor replacing her in the mind of those used to be conscious of her existence as of somebody else — Nina maybe flirting with Marietska — Bobby courting a young inexperienced Thai, trying to hire her for a month of accelerated learning — Maximine busy catering, and betraying who else...? — everyone’s forgotten the old sputnik, as if she never had been there, flying with the rest, caroming about, in flight, involute, evolute, volute..., acrobatic as the best of them...

But it must be alright. Life like this. You are counted when you count. Absent, you’re miscounted, discounted, and everyone gone somewhere else, to something else...

And yet hope renascent, nifty, self-propelled... A flier with helicopter wings, whose verticality amazes even herself... Extricating herself from the mud. Uprooted, aloft... For now she has a nicely pliable accomplice inside the very venter of the beast. Promises in abundance. A new love a-booming too.

19.

Bobby awoke sweating. Needles coursing his veins. His chest shilling for a grinding machine. The carnage behind the cage of his bruised ribs, dead confused meat. He thought, Probably another heart attack...

Propping himself with the walls, he reached the window. He looked through a panel of stirring fog. Outside, no lichen shark of lodestar loomed — no starved companion winked, no shriveled necromancer crone hurling astonishing appeasements — also some untoward liabilities of a stilted wreckage, from the bottom of the cold abysm... I used to be a drawing professor, he mused. And often I drew on the blackboard, with colored pieces of chalk, olden muses sourcing up among the disparaged chasms like a bleak skerry, atolls of them, a chorus of witches forewarning of imminent doom... Behind tall stelae of smoke they predicted that I could do worse than stay safely ensconced on the loggias behind the huge lit panels where the scores were showed...

I was eighteen, before I went into business and bought all those abandoned stadiums which when the sport craze came, with the advent of color television, resold at a profit of millions...

Gravelly vulvas, he thought, while from the next bedroom Maximine's savage snores reached his ears... He swallowed his explosive pill. His face bore an expression of bland despair. His eyes seeing nothing still but some dirty stationary cloud in front of them, or inside. He heard a dribble down the corridor. Marietska pissing...?

Nothing more to extract from those niggers, he thought. He heard a sob. A sob...? His own. Some privacy, he said. Extended his hand, found a thick woolen jersey. Seized it with a claw for a hand and he covered his face with it... In case another erratic sob chose to rise to the surface...

Diaspora, he thought. A sob with an attitude plops up from the dark stirrings of an unknown being living inside my skeleton... Would it switch on the amorous switch... No time enough. It's already dead, just a bubble, ephemeral.

Inside the muddy well of his past, past each one of those new scary islands, some graphics still lived — Mironian, expanded into more orthodox landscapes, Watteauian... His voice commanded, piercingly: "On, on..."

On for the very daggers of the scurrilous limbo of whom I must have been... Who knows. Is there a native soil of the soul...? Where you are yourself planted, as if having crashed in...? Before, bubble-like or thereabouts, also then the little plant that's you starts to wither, in a hammering never-quite-made-out allegro (the piss, the Pisa, the pies, the pious...?) of booming, big chorale words...? No, you can't decide which one to affix to you as the last fig leaf that holds together, albeit so fragilely, the dignity of your identity.

While woodenly unflinching (not yet so long ago) in front of a moaning apogee of prolific binges — binges of hemorrhagic choreography — which brought — with oh what galvanizing hermetism — sundry acquainted avatars off — off to changing frames of licketicut, licketicut — licketicut inter-sabotaging blobness...

How ticklingly they germinate, from cavernous guffaws too, four other severed fingers which hold, with rubber rings, medals made with cancelled money: epitome, your pate, of crazy uselessness — five or four senseless organs, eternally condemned, are throbbing sillily in a pool of tripe...

He fell, his right leg went totally numb, and failed.

"Bobby, are you all right? Are you crying, love?"

Maximine awake. Marietska deflowering him, or pumping his chest.

After that, they had lain back onto some irritated levers. Their reeling eyes

had closed. All was fixed but the objective. What a joke, was it not...? At least for us: a sent projectile.

He smelled some fiercely burned stuff. He thought: look at the broads, bumping into mazes of piffling private koans...

Soon everything shall be over. By then — tomorrow, the day after...? — none of them could care less... He...? Ah, he was left behind. Homelessly oozing in the lurch.

“Be laid,” he curses, in his mind. You are my business no longer, either of you. Want to die in peace... Thus, following the fumous specimen of his mind’s fire, frightening the pants off his neighbors with the flaming unheard shout of: “Make way then; so that I go at once in a Heroic Course...!”

He strode toward a mere gunwale, no, much higher, a brick wall, mad to turn with it, about, away, gone, fairly reattributed himself with attributes of ethereality, when...

“Remember, Bobby?”

“Yes, oh, and how!”

Soaked smithereens of lurid, macabre taffetas of engrossing nauseousness... Our bilious, quarrelsome pairs of eyes were now, I should guess, totally devoid anymore of barren loyalty, and brimmed, brimmed-brimmed, with pugnacious animadversion, again absolutely unwilling to, to-to, to let any new pseudo-magician get, get-get, get emptily away with, with-with, with any boringly soupy, soupy-soupy, soupy customary routine of hers — of idle (criminal even) legerdemain, legerdemain-legerdemain, legerdemain for officinal control of our cracking skeleton, yeah, and other divers ukasic prolixities...

They stroke upon his bell. Stroke-stroke, stroke.

Angrily, taunted... “What did we do wrong?” “Are you asleep yet?” They taunted. “Bobby, are you there, Bobby?”

Bobby, remember all those niggers shilled for you — so you always bragged — always the fictional action going on elsewhere — yonder, on the pitches, past the tainted glasses of the loggias — while the real action went on inside you...? All those provincial citizens paying courtesy to the king embosomed behind the scrim, the screen, the screams, the terrifying images imagined on the reflecting glasses...

Bobby, Bobby, it must be a surfeit. Too much booze, too much blood pudding, too much calabash...?

Bobby, jilt us again, your inertia, you know how it thrills us... It shows you at your best. Dismiss us. We are done. The month’s over. The book too...

“Time to do up!” — they shouted — cryptic children, hopping with flying bows — hoping, with flying brows... But their expectations were crushed as he immediately let go, he fell demurely into eternal silence. Immured, no contact with the pounding exterior.

That — which, again, could had been interpreted through a broad spectrum of quite contradictory reactions — had, therefore, the wrong virtue of further confounding the floundering crew — those numbers, those niggers of fictional action always at the ready for his disposal...? Crossed gazes all around, good and vainly trying to decipher perchance what...? Reciprocal proddings, mimetic shadowings — of a colloidal nature alright, of a frothy soapiness which stuck to your brains, thus thickening them further out...

Then they piped, still, and his photographic ears grew by beats, like bats’s. “There is no all, no other...” — they faltered, leaning despondently against the collapsing metal of his melting heart — meaning: “...remedy...?”

No reaction. And their spirits were rusting fast. One of them, possessed by some slothsome slumberous faucet of wit, poured: “Up, up, you fucker, up indeed, up an expanding scree of leftover urchins... Plenty of oomph left in thee! Nigerians to do, Thais, Guatemalans, Gabonese...”

Urchins whose time-lapse levitations flatter your trite senses into, into-into, into acknowledging that, okay, okay-okay, okay, all right, that there's virgin territory to... Unlimited constellations to map out, that's what. With what, what-what, what, with sporadical exhortations, yeah, of cozening instruction, of... Where's the harangue...?

Go on, rebyata, ahead, ahoy, hurrah! The unregretted instant has elapsed! Exult, *you guys*! The sublime repeated to exhaustion, wow! The mob spiraling, head over toes, higgledy-piggledy, like a massive turd flushed down...

Chinese shadows... Camera obscura... All those cut-outs, little caricatures, black puppets, count 'em, all those niggers that shilled for you...? Niggers? Persons? Persians, no doubt. Getting on on the action, a piece of, and of your wives' asses...

The ashen spies back, smoldering now with their lurid tidings... Maenads nine, all perfidious. They (them the roughnecks) shilled for you even in their fucking them (the wives) instead...? Yes, sir, plenty of grounds for divorce, mister Bobby, sir.

Your wives, the exotics... The Texan, toxic bitch, a tocologist's specimen... The New Englander, later with a croup like a frigate's..? The Vermonter, homely as a Vermeer...?

Did they ever leave in a huff, the roughnecks, the niggers...? What, who gives a damn...? They were dismissed, having worn out, exhausted their welcome. Mostly. Marooned someplace along the way. Atolls, skerries... Along the path... Did they croak there? Definitely...? Doubtful. Plus, for them, yourself the step up the ladder — the what? — the ladder, the ladder. Nasty prickles to an fro from my crazy own stapling cephalalgiae, faugh...! Let instead the dead moon prevail... Let it publish unawares which horrendous, sidereal coughing does it take to bestow the fruits of fleeting existence on — one-two..., one-two... — on, on-on, on... But now: the fatigue, the fatigue..., one-two..., the fatigue — my adorable, petty pettimalms... Let them approach and be mauled, yes? Yes? — yes?-yes? — yes...? One-two, and ah, how clear and perfect her twentieth, no, her twenty-fourth shape finally appeared to my misty eyes...

“Bobby, listen! Do you not...?”

She was not ruined — I remember brightly thinking. A virginal young girl. Such a vestal for the temple of my ecstatic chastity...!

Her great and wide-flaunted troubles — just as much as those deep and high-flown wishes of mine — once fixed, what do they become...? Bah, totally vulgar little concerns of one more poor devil going pigheadedly about his moronic business...

The spleen sets, invariably, the ennui... Whom would he stick this time with his palsied finger (bang!) in the bloody eye...?

While they were trying to fix the ring in his ears, fey time flew — fie, fell.

They thought they could be satisfied remedying, mending stuff, over what they guessed... Subdue if only, at least, his quiet thorns — as we are gazing at his shaky frame through soggy zigzagging gauzes — all these new soft thorns of flesh, blobs erupting — rejoice somehow, for it also may mean rebirth...

Suddenly, they (the blobs) throve and accrued in a sheer exercise of bizarre might... Then, of course, we must all have been really spurred... I believe we were exhilarated by and with that dizzy, dizzying expectation... What a scene: a painting by Brueghel: a kermis, peasants that dance... Behind the loggia’s grim scrim... All those niggers flailing, kicking... Bye and bye, though, the glut of their crude exuberance, by itself, came to betray an exhaustion gone wild... Frame after frame, a fanatic squandering of the last resources...

“He is vomiting...” “...or a heart attack.” “A sly possession, a furtive rattling satanic unseizure, disownment, a wide-opened anxiety allowed to rot into a gangrene...” “...a gangrene-gangrene, a gangrene of the spirit, of the melting tegument that sustains his assumptive presence...”

Hammers of the heart, the bantering throbs, illusorily wreaking murder, with the rest of the universe — its heart also giving frantically up...? In the frenzied, blundering suicide of the totally in-wound, engrossedly ingrown solipsist...?

The purr that poisoned itself — too long under our cloak, and we are showing signs of shellshock. Better look elsewhere... The women at the mirror, harpies.

The sniveling idiot at the window arrogated the blasts, monopolized the howls, and, regardless, via the undulating electromagnetic potentialities of the air, his bigoted, much-strained sermon went unheard. This side of that powered turbulence, the drones were entirely in command of themselves, in the dry.

“There is no love like home-love, and, while supplies for it last, why, there is the active thrust of that willed engine which can move a person to survive herself in spite of the most shattering contrarities...”

“Safe, Marietska, after the good end of all, across the more bedraggling penumbrae of emotional metamorphoses...”

Are they talking like a silly dying writer would make them talk...?

“As for your frantic roars of raving reversion, Maximine, your shameful inducement of involutory conversion, your deviate’s dextrogyrate pronouncements... Why, that sacrificial, dilapidating abandonment of yourself — so akin to the defeated fascist’s abject puling in his wake — which now has left so mangled — mayhap forever — your addictive dignity of which so much was always made by all of us, before you became that gagging insect rapt in holy fervor to attain, obtain the total blank, black snow of forgetfulness... Why, I say, Maximine, it is only natural in one’s mourning... It shall pass in two bits of a lambkin’s tail.”

They console each other already. Soft and damp, rags of moist flesh intermingled. Women, so resourceful..., isn’t it? But how better to check successfully that sweat that reeks already with the anti-therapeutic stench of the defeatist’s backwash...?

Mister Perfect dying so imperfectly. Vomiting, they said...?

From where I remained, vilely and trying — in painful dispersion — to beguile their diehard hard-set foolhardihood toward a belated understanding of its cruciferous nefariousness...

The worthlessness of it all. Efforts for naught, ridiculous.

Stop the undignified shenanigans, bitches to the end.

I did not sense any kind, albeit weak — as were the broken-in shackles of the repressed yearnings at my neck to enlist, to enlist... — and breathe, breathe...!

No acknowledgement, albeit faint, no, to my entreaties; no answer then to my placating cyclic search, but then again..., who else was there likely to meet me half way, if, until they themselves gave the proper orders, nobody could budge each from her own nailed childhood of dim reasoning, her own awkwardly starched infancy of movement, without, alas, turning for the worse, without, yes, calling — with her arduous act — all into an all around mutiny of unstoppable serialization...?

“His cells giving up one after the other, and the next, and the next... Until nothing obtains... A clear emptiness, so clean, at last.”

The drawings so meaningful... Mironian, Watteaunian, a conflation of sorts, amazing the pants off the young experts... But then the phosphorous, napalm, white Pete, the fuel burning slowly but down to the very marrow...

Taking sides, fast. For the winners. At the very least with the gorged pits of genocide — then with that glass-replicated providential summoning — over the deadening din of the meaningless, ubiquitous graphs on the analogous charts gone by all symptoms repugnantly autonomous... Above all, my salutary, orchestral clear call...

“Bobby the writer, rich!”

His wives, his girls, niggers of another hue. And they all wanted safe passage home. “After all, Bobby, you know, do you not, we each were but a link of limited spontaneity.”

“Has he...?” “Bobby...?”

They were distorted ice lumps bumping in lye, almost fed up of groping in the dark, blindly inveighing shadows that fleshed up.

“Ough, I am shilly-shallying, for sooth... Where’s my head...? Instead of cognac, I’m giving him to swallow what...?” “Is that lye, a bizarre perfume...?” “Something outlandish no doubt. He’s been gathering odd shits all of his life.” Both half asked-down into trashy lamentation.

Instead of brashly urged to my — by now well deserved, but who’s counting — sundry accomplishments — two hundred plus novels... A marvel of enigmatic research, and skilful pasting up... Seeing which, the piled volumes, one certainly must — dear mother — surrender this his impatient conviction without further reticences...

Know (and know tough: for a fate of a fact) that tomorrow — when jarring rhapsodies of flayed genomes will monotonously come to tear asunder the membranous, teratologically homeotic bubbles of your fluctuating body, to wreak a good devil of a havoc among the murky eidola that blatantly used to make up — oh, trivial atrophy! — the very bulk of your true followers... You, you — you-you, you repeated to exhaustion... That tomorrow the last frame must be — a must — a triumph of decay.

No exasperated stamina — no apt coalescence of the thirteenth hour — will then suffice to slough off the synergistic general gelatinization...

Vomiting indeed.

Vile and cornered, awry, driven berserk, immediately overcome by the common gushing output of many woggy somebodys turned a dirtier

inescapable mass — under the bland hammering chorus of the stereotyped: *it coheres, it coheres...* — no instigatrice (dilutely basking in the vitiating purgative hymn) will be able but to exorcismally up this last sorrowful ante, and (*next, next!*) permit — sort of garishly soiled: the soaring smokescreen of rocket-foil stabbing blindly — the sealing, the welding, the excruciatingly painful searing upon each pale arrival till, converted into another kind of wrecked ape, your previous face that at a slow pace grimaced the anthem, is now a chafing scratch that, to seasonally greet the marchers tries to speak louder and louder...

From my mouth — from their mouths (the replicas') — only maggots.

Their voices and mine, immortalized on burning paper...

But sure thing, they (the exotics left to finally melt into definitive grayness) shall be too ass-tightly flabbergasted then to recapture and still release, in all its mystagogically rich transpositions, at a pinch even the least one among the amazing articulator's marvelously labored old harangues — of such a painstakingly synchronized eloquence, too, as to make them plenty worth to be told and retold — many a dead time, what the fuck, no question about that — except that they (the owners, a foreign body called your present wife and her attorneys) had had them burn — making place for the new. She selling the house... Nobody, none of the nigger girls, demanding one of them packets of lies, not even aware of their own, so faithfully recorded, but who ever gave a shit...?

Though forbiddingly tough up till now, the notables today were shaken, so quaveringly near the crux of the action — a wrong nod, and seen forever in the villainous side of heroism — wow again! — but not a single one of his productions worth a try at the presses...?

“Bobby? Bobby?”

Fine, I am searching. He hoists himself for a last barfing and a last mewling. Back to you now...

What...?

Bobby. Bobby the writer. Dead.

20.

As Bobby the writer was busy dying, tiny Bobby Dick was busy getting born.

As Chuck attended Bobby's funeral and memorial service, Coralline at the same time was present at the pseudo-christening of the big new brat.

Later they talked by phone and commented about the two episodes as respectively witnessed by each. Their observations were somewhat biased, but, by Jingo, whose aren't.

As it happened, the afterimages were still powerful. The fire engulfing Bobby's casket. The cow-elephant pissing an intercrural yellow torrent that sparkled in the fiery Sun.

At Bobby's sending off, some of his exes were there — the frigging frigate bird was there, pompously in front — as were a couple of his three or four estranged children. A chap of thirty-odd, student of philosophy, said a few words taken, or allegedly taken, from senator Boethius... Something about "The sweet poison of letters... When sniffed a few doses every day, being a healthier anodyne than laudanum or heroine..., and then that, by avoiding foul shitty smells, and instead smelling little pouches of fine herbs, health also improving a lot... Providence giving you already such weapons, as a big nose, that, if you had not messed them through ugly vices, you would have been indefinitely preserved from disease and smelly agony... Pagan witches being always in the right, compared to the stupid preachers and canons of the religions of today, who stress foreknowing, when foreknowing of course makes any action worthless, as diet itself would if you'd knew that it would really work out a hundred per cent of the time, but you know that it doesn't, for still everywhere you see all those fat fuckers who wasted their money and time and are still such eyesores and nose-smacker for the rest.

And in fact this, in fine, that predestination all in all is such a shit...”

Nobody paying him any attention but for the fat mothers around, readying their umbrellas to trip him or wallop his balls if he happened to pass nearby...

Anyway, later all these maxims the moronic Maximine would gainsay in her garbled exposition of credulities. She's another not too persuasive Mormon. Those clueless Mormons never persuasive enough, the pack of heavenly garbage they try to swindle you with, unswallowable even by the most obnoxiously limited. Door to door they bang, stinking of cowpats and peasant stupidity, and try to convince you that they got something in there that makes any frigging sense even to despaired depressive lifer housewives with no prospects of ever shedding their chains of drudgery or even their tremendously crushing weight.

“In pristine hindsight,” she also said, more or less, “the spook for whom the dirges of love and unmerited favor so graciously showered by Jesus upon him are being sung falsetto and softly enough in the background, wasn't (the spook) so unleavened as the unleavened bread nor so sour as the grape juice (our savior's attributes transmogrified) that we will shortly serve... He was a so-so guy with a mania for bottomry. All his hired help had wide bottoms indeed, plus he betted on the bottomry of his loaded shelves — he put all his money or all his vain illusions, let's say, on the successful completion of his literary ship's journey — and the accruing freight of a volume added monthly — with interests (above the ongoing rate) of vast glory posthumous..., and yet, alas, wholesale obsolescence crept up on him before he had bad (or bidden or bid) (or had beat it) adieu to his shabby cloak of a earthly body...”

Outside, on the village square, a few youths were goofing away... They were poleaxing a squirrel, whose cries of anxious woe improved on the shitty choir's shitty songs — Chuck being half Chinese, pronounced, very appropriately here indeed, shitty as shiti (shiti meaning corpse in Chinese) — the shitty hymns sounding on the beam ends. Managing as a surplus to put everybody's nerves on edge.

Finally, Maximine, following perhaps their quaint perverse Mormon practices, stuck to the shipping metaphors, and...

“In Viking fashion, him who so appreciated the ethnic angle of everything, now that his ship has reached final port — and fully loaded, indeed! I must say — dammit, when taken from clew to earing, the hapless dear bastard, at least two gross of self-published books he would be sticking us with... Except that, of course, very charitably we’ve included them in the same act of holy cremation, for though we all enjoyed them so much when freshly out of the presses, though nobody ever acknowledged reading one or even a page of one, now nobody either has bid (bad, bad boys? bidden?) a single cent for any of them, and we, as always, need the room... It’s quite understandable moreover that he’d prefer having them in fumous fashion, as himself, up there — up yours, with you, to the very end, how poetical, each book calling after him — up there, yes, at the right hand or world-clad claw of him whose whim it was to credit him with so-called life...”

Thus, whatever, but the whole collection, the two gross plus of monthly volumes, overly titled “The Secrets and Mysteries of the Ethnics,” now were serving as mere kindling to the same fire that burned him and his casket...

Chuck was irritated by everything. The tackiness of vile Mormonism, the gullible middlebrow turd-sucking dyed-in-the-wool Americans, (smelling of the hideous dyeing process too,) their stinking songs, their stinking perfumes and dresses and hats, and paunches and medals and crucifixes, and rosaries and all the idolaters’ disgusting knickknacks, plus, alas, his own diapers brimming... How he longed to leave that chair, and walk and dance around the village square, square on his hands, his pants kicked away, his balls a-bouncing, the nasty youths applauding, the squirrel singing his own protracted procrastinating dirge...

“And thus, with a bottle of cheap champagne, Viking fashion, ‘tis my honor — my honor ‘tis — to launch into the everlasting fire his final ship!”

Percipient now, her wits suddenly honed after Bobby’s death — what with her introduction to women’s power and the (more invigorating still) empowering of lesbianism meanwhile — Marietska, keen on her toes, aware of her renewed chores, keyed up the music to the max for a suitably apocalyptic finale. The revulsive choir came louder than hell. Chuck wheeled himself out of the building and into the waiting bus...

He had been before the service at Maximine's, where the bitch and her favorite maid had put to the higher bidder everything unwanted — all of Bobby's belongings, up to his last tape and notebook — both of which sets of items were later burned, as there were no takers whatever... And a rich mama's boy of thirty-eight (one of the sons of one of the exes) who as it happened was always looking for bargains snatched from Maximine Bobby's whole collection of vintage first-edition LP records (the sleeves intact, Bob Dylan, Muddy Waters, Howling Wolf, in their shiniest...) for 25 cents each, when Chuck, who knew the market, would have been ready to pay 5 dollars each... Only that he is not family (he is never family) and had access to the goodies too late. Chuck managing to buy but unlucky Bobby's kraut pistol, with which he (the naive writer) had intended to commit a beautifully dignified suicide...

Coralline had been present both at tiny Bobby Dick's (Suze's son) birth and later at his christening — his christening of sorts, the mother belonging to that outlandish sect with the heinous elephant as totemic god and so on.

Bobby Dick was delivered off her mother the same night Bobby the writer gave up the ghost. Slightly heavier than his mother, though not taller than her by an inch or two, Bobby Dick made his exit from the too narrow and dire straits internment inside his prehistoric Venus of a mom's bodily cage breaking tissues pell-mell. (In regard to the issue as to the weight and measures of each, who delivered or got delivered of whom was a question never posed aloud, but now Chuck and Coralline, through the line, gaggingly embroidered on it...)

The Thai boys were playing at marbles... Silent and serious in their seemingly deadly enterprise... A few strangers were murderously looking in, their teeth denuded...

During the length of the proceedings, the little monstrous squealer was smelling in his cradle, the little monstrous smeller was squealing in his cot (and the kot-leckers hypocritical in their praises, as always.)

A bit nauseated, Coralline waited nonetheless for what should come next. She'd scatter tidbits to the birds that came to peck at the cow-elephant's splattered cowpats. Most of Suze's buddies were irrevocable dimwits. The mom herself, completely patched up after the ordeal, looked defeated,

overwrought, her vixen's thick tawny hairs like widow's weeds over her humpty trunk.

Then their flibbertigibbet of a rabbi — another disgusting rabbi of sorts for another disgusting obscure sect — came in, reciting some mantras and what have you. (Not a kikey thing, really, but almost, all but.) First he went to pay his outrageously opprobrious respects to the idol. He prostrated himself as long (or rather as short) as he was under the gruesome totem, a grotesque pagan-clumsy effigy of the pachyderm... Next he pumped up and down its trunk-like tale, the while making believe he was smelling the sacrosanct effluvia emerging from the its siphonal fulcrum...

Dick looking richly like a sack of bletted garbage, lost in a corner, trying to become surely an escaping wisp of smoke if at all possible less foul than everything everyone was aspersing everything else with... Otherwise, everybody else, the lot of them second-rowish wogs, at attention, as if deserving the fast retribution of an impromptu neck-shortening by having to swallow an embodied kris, from the sleeve of one of the service attendants, to the jeweled hilt.

The rabbi took now a spongy towelette and went to soak it in the piss of the cow-elephant...

The words were next understandable... Instead, the maddened screams of the elephantine baby much more clear... Clearly meaning that the whole operation couldn't almost be viler, and swearing already atrocious revenges...

Coralline was happy that Dick was stuck for the rest of his natural walk to his particular calvary with that huge pagoda-sized barnacle of a fucking parasite on his back... Chuck agreed from the other end of the line. Such apt desserts all round the way...

They sent each other warm kisses and promised to gather more gossip to spread... For each other's ears only. Such companionship developing. Another miracle of human warmth, and yen for healthy contact...

21.

—I'm thinking seriously about going back to performing — with swords and parrots this time...?

—I'm reading "To Liberty Through Love" by Charles Fourier...?

—Let's suppose the operation is successful, let's contemplate the wonder: plaster casing flying and me walking again...?

—He talks about how to placate the pussy with cunt music of banged cello and heavy percussion...?

—Me appearing, an August, pale, beyond porch and portal, no fuss, no announcer, just silence, crowned with calm...

—He sees the unsexed bodies as purposeless cenotaphs, carapaces with nothing as merchants' avaricious claws...?

—From the chicken coops, who emerges by the pale cotton candy colored parrots...? A flock of holy spirits, like chaff in the wind, dispersed...?

—He says whatever creams your pants is gotta be fine, the food of the gods for your spirit...?

—In the background, cavernous, Patsy Cline singing that she falls to pieces...?

—He says, Gather yourself, enjoy what's left, always what's left...

—...pieces of china all over the floor, all those broken plates, the crowd thinking meanwhile I'm such a klutzy prestigiator...?

—Find a patch of clear in the plenilune...?

—Pedicure...? Anyway, everybody assuming I've got bum elbows, ok?

—Open the cellophaned package...? Don't be abashed, you are klug genug, clever enough to know that the only eyes that matter are those of your soul, and your soul is always smiling on you...?

—Then I make believe them believe that I'm not only a wretched klutz but I'm pestered by blasts of cough and sticky phlegms of chronic catarrh...?

—Take the dildoes out, no need to concoct complicated plots like you are another silly choirboy with a Hitlerian cowlick...?

—I'm playing to the crowd, I'm pawing de carpet, like I'm looking for my truncheon, the one I've been using trying to balance the plates that invariable crashed and broke...?

—Pull no punches, ok? He says, And don't worry about anything at all, if your breath reeks, if your body groans with arthritic pains, if your soul's fagged out..., if you've been declared void since long ago by all your neighbors and acquaintances, if nobody's been paying any attention to you for ages...

—Here come the parrots... At the periphery of the crowd the flock awakes, they are gray carnivorous parrots, for their weight, the more intelligent beings on earth... They clutch captive close to their puffed up chests a beating flat plastic heart that intermittently lights and fades... They are in love.

—Prime yourself like a troll, liberate your cowered outer wrappings... Shout to the moon through the clearing, become a witch, nothing healthier for ruefully encaged individual...

—The clumsy truncheon has become an elegant narrow flexible saber... The

enamored parrots come to me, the parted flock of twenty, ten at every ear of me, like they are bombs I'm bombarded with...

—Fourier says, Never mind amending the classics... Toss them to the big pyre... All is church shit, inquisitorial inventions to shackle the future generations...

—Four flights of the saber, as four swats of the whizzing twig withy, two at each side, and the twenty eager parrots are decapitated on the floor, blood all over the pieces of shiny white china...

—He says, It only matters what the now obtains, what obtains the now... And Wittgenstein said the same before...? Ask the caveman if your fucking progress means to him anything but added garbage...? Bloody grating complication to a life otherwise up till now in unison with compassionate nature...?

—...the blood itself coming from the flat pouches, the fake hearts...? The pretended heads separated from the bodies the empty little bags turned inside out, looking perfectly from a distance like recently severed parrot heads...? A trim of drying blood as a necklace that slowly dissolves...?

—Don't do another slipshod job of your single-shot life...

—Darkness overflows, suddenly following... A trill of chatty drums... Light's back, brighter than ever, and the twenty are parrots alive and crowning me with a nimbus loaded with spiritual significance...? Touring my glorious head like I'm again the chosen figure...?

—The catalyst...

—The catalyst, you've got that right.

—...that changes your life, brings it back to nature, from where it had been kidnapped by the evil forces of merchant civilization...?

—In my wake, the plaudits, the applause, probably too overwhelming to ignore... For what it's worth, Johnny Latrina, the officiating barker, is of the opinion that it would pay to have the great Saber-Wielding Illusionist Contortionist back into stage again...

—Be unique, he says, in escaping hostility. Hostility is built in. Everybody who is born in the plagued baleful baneful rotten cage of civilization, where only the greed of the merchants matters, is burned in and for life in hostility... For hostility's sake you are brought to the shit-pile, the merdier...?, and the more hostile the more you obey the strictures of your slave-masters...

—Yeah... But what do you think about the new act...?

—Huh...? Did you hear what I told you about the return to the cave... No holding back... Nature invading, and you part of it...?

—Yeah... But...

—No, your act is excellent, but the more it touches the freedom of the old ages, when the grotesque advent of merchant class had not happened... Probably a monstrous mutation, you know...? Listen, I've seen there is a contest in the big mall by the river...? All the stores getting together and offering awards to the best paintings exposed up and down the aisles...?

—Have you taken up painting now...?

—I'm becoming a fellow artist. Are you feeling threatened...? My intention is to paint fire... Just anthropomorphic images of flames... The forest consumed by the fire and the specters of all the natural people emerging, ascending... Blacks and reds...

—I'm thinking myself blacks and reds for my new uniform...? And the parrots of course such a contrasting gray...?

The "dialogue" was interrupted. Simultaneously, something or somebody

(ubiquitous...?) was knocking on their very own doors... “Somebody at the door,” said both of them at the same time. “Call me!” “I’ll call you!”

Maximine was at Coralline’s door. At Chuck’s Thai, the Suze. (Have I got it wrong...?)

22.

No, I’ve got it right. In this “Epilogue of Decollation and Fire” my purpose, I purport, is to finish them all off.

Maximine in the good graces of Coralline again, Chuck humping the Suze. Willie the jackal escaping with the help of his buddies in the system, of course...

Dick, Marietska, Nina, the detective Howard... Who else...?

Ah, yes, a short moment ago, jabbering about spark plugs, the guy in the garage, giving a rose-colored fig for Maximine’s Jag. As who wouldn’t, the guy such a dedicated bloke...?

He was turning some screws and all at once reading on the sly a superior reprint of one of Bobby’s ethnic furtive mysteries — a homosexual fantasy called “Those Were the Ticks that Tickled his Fanny,” signed with a Chinese-sounding pseudonym (the Chinese being after all the folks he respects above all others...) — where a rabid Bengalese has both his goose cooked and welcomes a divine celluloidal apparition of sorts at the bottom of a ravine..., when, as the storm hit harder, the current gave up, in unison the garage’s lights went all off, and only the tinier, more concentrated glare in his spelunker’s helmet held firm...

The mechanic, whose name was Whitecheck, was told by the boss he could go home also... Whitecheck here replying that he wanted to wash a bit before, the boss, in return, before scrambling away, answering that, as he

himself had locked the office, Whitecheck should make certain that he closed tight the shop also...

Meanwhile, let's not lose sight of the suffering fellow, the smashed Bengali at the bottom of the ravine... Who, as a consequence to the many bones cracked and the accompanying fever, was heavily hallucinating...

Under the steady headlight, tittered and tottered the sweet delayed orgasm of the mechanic as his hero tonight, the Bengali shepherd, in his dry, yet searing wit, tried in his delirium to reconcile relativity and quantum mechanics, and the hairs in his nose, accordingly to the writer, not dissimilar to those surrounding his fragrant asshole, were tiny vibrating strings of energy... His auburn eyes saw in their fever from nine to eighteen dimensions, and myriad parallel universes were bluntly added as he lodged his complaints in frantic undercuts against the cruel faggotty face of the glowing goggly moon.

The point about who the winner of the bout would be being moot from slide or photogram number one.

Hidden behind the door, there were Whitecheck's cloaks and daggers, and in the pocket of one of his cloaks, all alike in their shiny blackness, there was, carefully concealed, a baloney sandwich... He blithely overran a few big tanks of exhausted oil. "Big oil," he thought, "murderous concerns creating economical models whose irresponsible expenditures exhaust the earth itself. We as humans all sullied, all dishonored as keepers or stewards of ship earth. We've put death before values, we've replaced profit motives for the reliance on the clean pristine bounties of nature... Everything has been turned into big gobs of shit, the whiff of capitalistic state terrorism..."

Before exiting from his narrow closet with his baloney sandwich, Whitecheck turned off the lantern on the brow of his helmet... Then, on the rough surface of the garage, he skillfully avoided the implements, the cans, the machines and mechanisms, the cars themselves...; tiger-like, he approached the gate... He stood on his toes, he furled back the veiling curtain; cautiously, as if afraid of a sniper, he peered through the transom... The earth in front, buffeted and tormented by the scrambling dirling storm, seemed to cry in agony... The rain, tears of pain... Today the earth is raped by big oil and big cars and big planes and big armored trucks

and big bombs and big shits commanding the ubiquitous rape... Quis cras ipsum volebit? — Who shall want it in the future...? It shall be discarded as a dried up, burned up, used up jalopy... Another worthless planet carbonized, not even good as scrap metal, too polluted, contaminated...

No mangy gift dog of a messiah seeing fit to unturf its eyelashes and resurrect... Probably died long ago of earth-poisoning, as a tyro, untried grub, before he could transmogrify properly even priming itself for next phase, the one that made it earthwormy enough that could allow it to climb to the fiery radioactive petrol-soaked surface...

He drew out the curtains, he went inside Maximine's Jag, he lit his light, he unwrapped his sandwich, he opened his book, faintly reeking of spilled, spoiled kerosene, he resumed reading it (the stinking spool of a buckled book) — scrolling diligently its suffusing pastoral bliss — parsimoniously getting to the climax through steps of delicious antsy titillation — saplings of hope erupting always, or almost always, on the way, abruptly sending you back perhaps to a paradisiacal bosquet, in a persnickety onslaught on the disencumbered senses — no more cricks and inflexibilities — you are lithe as a contortionist, not groggy and scroggy and hampered by the onus of incrustated guilt — you are furthermore a-swim in a generous superfluity of seminiferous text — graciously served by that otherwise blatantly ignored great writer, the prodigiously non-notorious (how strange!) Bobby Chung Ching...

This beautiful literature rehabilitates my spirit. The scheming chemistry never slackening its grip... Paradigms of sublimation thrown tumultuously, obscene abductions of the soul, brought to welkins of unbalance above the void... Something like that, at the very least. Different paradigms making you inhabit different worlds, for sure, quite, quite...

He threw unquiet glances all around. Finally he squatted, eased the way to his cock, unfastened his fly, drilled in with his free hand... In a jiffy, sandwich and narcotics had been properly sucked up... His eyelashes, such a sissy geometry of hairs, drew closer by degrees...

The handsome Bengali shepherd's shaky hand reached for his baggage... Down from his girdle hung a purse full of frills... Ah, but with what dismay

Whitecheck read that the shepherd, whose name was Circussized (though, through some understandable shortcut of the imagination plus the careless fast spelling, Whitecheck read it as Circumcised the whole of the while,) took out from the bag a sharp shepherd's knife.

He feared for Circumcised's life, or else his balls...?

He was full of fervor, and ecstatic, enraptured enough, while praying mentally to the author of the scripture he held in his less active hand, that he promised that if he (the writer, or the personage, whoever held at the instant the strongest will,) if he would stay his own hand, if he'd not cross the taw line and (the writer) didn't evict the handsome boy from the novel, and the boy wished or chose to linger, he (the reader) would stay his own also, if at least for a while, delaying longer still the agonizing orgasm...

A line of tis (palm-like trees from over there, remarked the author in a semi-learned aside) held the line against the rumble of the earthquake which had thrown the handsome shepherd down the fatal ravine... The tis flailed in the breeze like they were accoutered also with the arms of hammy actresses...

He, Circussized, had been wooing a wether, and not even the bell-wether, but a particularly fat and well fleeced wether nonetheless — not altogether unprepossessing then — when he heard the first crack of the whip ushering ominous from a crack on the angry surface of the earth itself — where every human already dead is but the amount of a little bicker of yellow dirt — and every live one but the potential little urn of ineluctably yellowing ashes — so that when the final burning comes... Whitecheck peered at the jerky hands of his wristwatch. It was getting late. He had to skip the fillers...

The wethers were all tainted, destined for meat, and meet for death, but who wasn't... (...) A shepherd has always need of a bell-wether, and he himself occasionally has to carry the bell or the wether or both... (...) And one may indeed lie down with greasy hoggets as with wool wethers, and yet long for the smoother skin of a man — if a resurrected one still much better, imagine his maggoty skin. (Yeah, do!)

The writer hyped the whines the hard-bitten handsome mountain semi-god

couldn't stifle in his excruciating pain. With his knife, the shepherd, in his feverish delirium thinking of himself maybe as one of his dearest bucks being primed for a most famous roast, was slowly skinning himself... Chinese torture indeed... The mechanic was pumping like mad...

Old clips of dead cinema stars were crossing his mind... The old dead stars were advertising now new wares — only the words had changed — the scenes were the same — smug scenes, prescient scenes, perjured scenes...

Most of the stars were women chatting away... Center stage. (The faggy crews lost in the foggages...) One held the rudder of a yacht and blabbered about tins of fish being so good for your health... Another dead beautiful star, very contrivedly, and outrageously made up, totally incredible in her stupid role, held a bulrush fish-basket and was romping among the marooned barks... She was advertising cold-cream...

A dead magnificent very titty star had climbed over an elephant, she was under a circus tent indeed... And Circussized saw the elephant's cock lengthen to lengths extremes, while the wooden actress announced how good and wholesome was certain brand of extremely fat condensed milk...

A highly-disliked twit of a homosexual actor (all over the world, all through the ethnicities, asked the author, have you ever seen an artist not homosexual...?) was ordered to scam by a princess in an orange and bejeweled robe a mile wide. While the twit was disappearing through one of the wings, mincingly winking to the public, the princess from her throne saw fit (out of the blue) to order also a succulent sandwich, the pride of some stinking chain of one force-feeding restaurants or other...

Rickety cynosure of the moribund Bengali, next came a-shining a bevy of laughing mute actresses whose superimposed voices acquired the whirring sizzle of another chunk of skin being slowly pulled away from his mangled body. They were sunk in a trench of the fictional first World War... It had never happened, it all (the studio-produced fabulous shebang) had belonged to a ballet in an American Musical — no first World War, nor second, nothing... The world turning silkily around... Anyway, everybody knows is common practice among women to reinvent the world when they chat away, and now they were recommending the dresses sold by a chain of dress-making barons...

As Circussized squinted at the cinema legends never quitting, eternal in the advertising of new and newer wonders, and Whitecheck squinted at the Christ-like figure torturing himself after the earth had tortured him — torture after torture after torture — as one finally snuffed it, the other finally — ah, finally, finally — came.